

**A DIALOGIC MODEL FOR ANALYZING CRISIS COMMUNICATION:  
AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING  
THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CLERGY SEX ABUSE CRISIS**

A Dissertation

by

SUZANNE ELIZABETH BOYS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2007

Major Subject: Communication

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## ABSTRACT

A Dialogic Model for Analyzing Crisis Communication:

An Alternative Approach to Understanding the Roman Catholic Clergy Sex Abuse

Crisis. (December 2007)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Charles Conrad

In the winter of 2002, *The Boston Globe* published an exposé on clergy sexual abuse in the Boston Archdiocese which quickly sparked a global Church crisis. Following the exposé, there was a swell of media attention, a growing public outcry, increasing litigation over alleged abuse and cover-ups, and the emergence of issue-driven grassroots organizations. Despite the vocal involvement of numerous stakeholders in the crisis, the hierarchy's communicative response to the situation followed relatively traditional crisis management strategies which sought to deny, minimize, remediate, and retain exclusive jurisdiction over the crisis. This strategy contrasts with other stakeholders' attempts to defer closure, draw out underlying issues, amplify non-dominant voices, contest dominant interpretations, and collaborate on possible solutions. What has emerged is an on-going situation in which an organization's attempts at strategic communicative crisis management are being contested publicly by key stakeholders.

Arguing that existing models for understanding public relations discourse are insufficient for tracing the polyvocality of crisis communication, this study crafts an alternative (i.e., dialogic) model for analyzing crisis communication. This model

decenters the source organization by tracing the contextual (macro) and interactive (micro) aspects of public relations texts created by three organizations central to the crisis (the United States Council of Catholic Bishops, Voice of the Faithful, and Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests).

By viewing crisis communication through the lens of a particular notion of dialogue (i.e., *a sustained, symbol-based, contextualized, collaborative-agonistic process of interactive social inquiry which creates meaning and a potential for change*), this study traces how organizations use Public Relations (PR) to co-construct an organizational crisis. *Discursive reconciliation*, the central process of the proposed model, allows the researcher to sift the discourses of stakeholder organizations against one another, using each as a standard for evaluating the others. This allows for an evaluation of how stakeholder organizations manage the potential for communicative interactivity. The proposed model offers an expanded capacity to understand how crises are constructed discursively. It also illuminates the continuing clergy sex abuse crisis.

## **DEDICATION**

To all those who have been wounded by clergy and left for lost...

To those who have stopped to help...

To Murray, who sailed with me through my stormy waters...

To the One who called me to this inexplicable journey...

L'Chaim.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although writing and research may be lonely work, one does not do them alone. Many people have helped and supported me in the living of this dissertation.

Thanks, first, to my committee at Texas A&M: Dr. Charley Conrad, Dr. Linda Putnam, Dr. Joel Iverson, and Dr. Carolyn Conrad. Special thanks to my mentor and advocate, Dr. Gail Fairhurst.

Sincere thanks also to those making a difference in the clergy sex abuse crisis. My thanks to those individuals who have paved the way from victim to survivor. Thanks to those who are committed to healing the Body, especially those in VOTF and SNAP. Thanks to individuals like Barbara Blaine, David Clohessy, and Fr. Tom Doyle who doggedly fight for justice.

On a personal note, I would like to thank those who helped me navigate this chapter in my life. Deep gratitude to Dr. Tom Thompson and Dr. Ron Lutz, who helped me heal. Thanks to my brother, Mark Boys, and my friend, Susan Duncan, who intervened at key moments. Thanks to those who listened to my story along the way, especially Dr. Carolyn Clark, Adam Saenz' CommGroup, Jennifer Considine, Jill Grage, Evan Griffin, and Kelly Boys. Thanks to all those who prayed me through, including my family, the New Life prayer groups, the VCC prayer teams, and my VCC small group. Special thanks to everyone who checked on me during the process, especially my parents, Amy Savage, Jon and Charity Boys, Susan Duncan, Gail Fairhurst, and Brian Quick. Lifelong gratitude to my parents for their abiding friendship.

Finally, thanks to the One who redeems all things.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND CASE

In the winter of 2002, *The Boston Globe* published an exposé on clergy sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church. Although this was not the first time U.S. Catholic priests were accused of sexual exploitation, this was the first time that substantive allegations of systemic complicity were levied publicly against the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the United States. During the weeks and months following the initial exposé, there was a swell of media attention, a growing public outcry, increasing litigation over alleged abuse and cover-ups, and the emergence of issue-driven grassroots organizations. Escalating public involvement with the issue of clergy sexual abuse challenged the U.S. Catholic bishops' attempts to internalize and thus retain exclusive control of the situation. As the U.S. Roman Catholic hierarchy lost exclusive jurisdiction over the situation, it became clear that sexual exploitation by priests could no longer be delimited as a few isolated incidents in the Boston Archdiocese. It had escalated into an international organizational crisis.

Not only was the hierarchy repeatedly confronted with allegations of systemic complicity with abuse, but its attempts to manage the crisis were contested vigorously by a variety of stakeholders. The early *Globe* articles paved the way for an increasingly audible public discourse on the phenomena of clergy sexual abuse. Key stakeholders

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This dissertation follows the style of *Management Communication Quarterly*.

weighing in on the issue include grassroots groups focused on supporting those victimized by clergy (advocacy groups) and on changing the Church (dissent groups), individuals alleging sexual exploitation (victims/survivors) and their families, civil and criminal courts, members of the laity and the Roman Catholic hierarchy, and a wide variety of media. These stakeholders have found expression in many venues, from depositions to press releases, from promotional materials to newsletters, from books to conferences, from media releases to personal letters, from court briefs to news reports, from protests to petitions, from movies to interviews, and so on.

Despite the vocal involvement of numerous stakeholders in the crisis, the hierarchy's communicative response to the situation has followed relatively traditional crisis management strategies (i.e., apologia and image restoration discourse) with the goal of single-handedly 'resolving' the crisis. This communication (in the form of policies, homilies, surveys, press releases, self-audits, meetings, apologies, etc.) has sought to deny, minimize, remediate, and control the crisis, all under the exclusive auspices of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. This discursive position stands in contrast to other stakeholders' attempts to defer closure, draw out underlying issues, amplify non-dominant voices, contest dominant interpretations, and collaborate on possible solutions. What has emerged, then, since the winter of 2002 is an on-going situation in which an organization's attempts at strategic communicative crisis management are being contested publicly by a variety of stakeholders.

In order to unpack the discourse of this communicative situation, it is essential to move beyond an organization-centered perspective of crisis communication. Restricting

the analysis to the U.S. Roman Catholic Church's crisis discourse, even accounting for its defensive (and thus reactive) nature, would fail to engage the polyvocality of the situation. In turn, this would obscure ways in which crisis communication is used to leverage organizational power, and how it is used to affect the unfolding crisis. To foreground the contested co-construction of crisis communication, this dissertation argues for a fundamental shift in how researchers view crisis communication.

Rather than an organization-centered assessment of crisis communication, with an emphasis on the strategic communication of what might be called the 'source' organization, this study decenters the source organization in order to engage the polyvocality in crisis communication. The driving argument of this dissertation is that a dialogical analysis will offer an expanded capacity to understand the way in which crises are constructed discursively. To test this assumption, the study constructs and applies a particular (as will be further specified) dialogical perspective on crisis communication.

In order to contextualize this study, the following section gives a more particular overview of the clergy sex abuse crisis.

### **The Case**

In looking for a way to summarize the key events of the clergy abuse crisis, it makes sense to turn to *The Boston Globe's* Pulitzer Prize winning coverage. With Boston the undisputed epicenter of the crisis, *The Globe* was uniquely positioned to track the situation. Further, as the only major US archdiocese in which over half of the population is Catholic (i.e., 2 million Catholics out of 3.8 million citizens), Boston offered an interesting context for the crisis (*The Boston Globe* Investigative Staff, 2002,

p. 7). A special investigative team from *The Globe* broke the story in January 2002, subsequently writing over 300 articles, a book (*Betrayal*, 2002) and creating an extensive website ([www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/](http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/)) on the subject.

Although *The Globe* began with a focus on Boston, it expanded its coverage as the crisis spread. According to *The Globe*, its original story became “an international story about how the rights of powerless individuals are pushed aside in the interests of a powerful institution, about how mortals can damage an immortal faith” (*The Boston Globe* Investigative Staff, 2002, p. 8). (Note that even *The Globe*’s critique is couched in essentially reverential view of Catholicism.) In its chronology of the crisis, the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) describes *The Globe*’s exposé this way: “The Boston Globe launches a series of articles on the case of Father John Geoghan and the handling of clerical sex abuse cases in general in the Archdiocese of Boston which eventually sparks a national crisis for the Church in the United States” (USCCB, n.d., “USCCB Efforts to Combat”).

According to *The Globe*’s (2002) book on the subject, what had been a latent problem in the US Roman Catholic Church broke into an undeniable organizational crisis in June 2001. In a court filing at that time, the Archbishop of Boston, Cardinal Bernard Law, admitted to knowingly reassigning an alleged sexual abuser (Rev. John Geoghan) without disclosing his problematic record. For *Globe* reporters, “that document was a turning point: a story about a priest who was accused of molesting children was now a story about a bishop who protected that priest” (*The Boston Globe*

Investigative Staff, 2002, p. ix). At stake was the difference between an isolated case and a systemic problem.

Rev. Thomas Doyle, a priest and canon lawyer whose cautionary 1985 report (with Ray Mouton and Michael Peterson) on clergy sex abuse was largely ignored by the Catholic hierarchy, argues that the most recent chapter of the Church's historic problem with clergy sexual abuse began with the 1984 case of Father Gilbert Gauthé in Lafayette, Louisiana. In this case, Gauthé was indicted on 34 counts of sexual misconduct against 11 children and admitted to having sexual contact with boys in each of every parish he had 'served' since his ordination (Filosa, 2002). After years of legal wrangling, Gauthé entered into a plea bargain that sentenced him to a 20-year prison term. He was released after ten years due to a legal loophole, however, and was quickly arrested for assaulting a three-year-old (Filosa, 2002). The Gauthé case cost the Lafayette diocese \$20 million; it also spurred Mouton (Gauthé's defense lawyer) and Doyle (then a Vatican Embassy canon lawyer) to co-author the report mentioned above.

In Doyle's view, the current chapter in this crisis stands out due to the clergy's response to allegations of abuse. Instead of aiding alleged victims, "Church officials routinely responded to victims by intimidating them in hopes of obtaining their silence. They also manipulated, stonewalled, deceived and threatened victims" (Doyle, n.d., "A Very Short History"). The result was that victims pursued justice in civil rather than canonical courts. As noted in the opening paragraphs, this externalization of the crisis fundamentally challenged the hierarchy's capacity to control the situation.

*The Globe* staff concur with Doyle's assessment, arguing that although the problem had been known since the mid-1980s, this was the first time that the hierarchy were shown to have "repeatedly put the welfare of their priests ahead of that of the children in their care" (*The Boston Globe* Investigative Staff, 2002, p. x). Cardinal Law responded to the growing public outrage with an apology. He quickly agreed to release names of accused priests, and declared a zero-tolerance policy for abusers and support for victims (*The Boston Globe* Investigative Staff, 2002, p. x). In general, this initial response, an example of traditional apologia, was favorably received. However, as Law's rhetoric began to clash with his actions, public outcry increased. Strong response came from the laity (many of whom called for Law's resignation and/or withheld donations), state legislators (who passed a bill making clergy mandatory reporters), law enforcement officials (who began issuing arrest warrants for accused priests), victims (who began stepping forward publicly) and lawyers (who began refusing silent settlements) (*The Boston Globe* Investigative Staff, 2002, p. x, 3-5). At this stage, the number of active (and vocal) participants in the crisis increased rapidly.

A history of secrecy (in the church and the court system) had left little to no trace of previous claims of abuse. It was not until *The Globe* levied a court challenge that documents in the watershed case were made public. As a result of the paper's claim that "the public interest in unsealing the documents outweighed the privacy concerns of the litigants," papers in the Geoghan case were unsealed in January 2002 (*The Boston Globe* Investigative Staff, 2002, p. xi). Within weeks of publishing its initial exposé, dioceses around the nation found themselves grappling with how to respond to the burgeoning



crisis. Despite the hierarchy's attempts to delimit the crisis to a few perpetrators, then to one archdiocese, it had grown to national proportions.

By February 19, 2002, Bishop Wilton Gregory, president of the USCCB had added his own formal apology to that of Law; he had also called for a combined lay/hierarchy effort to ensure the safety of Catholic children. At the same time, Voice of the Faithful (VOTF), a Boston-based lay organization, was emerging in response to the crisis. Although it began as a "listening session" of 30 parishioners in St. John the Evangelist church in Wellesley, Massachusetts, VOTF grew to over 25,000 global members within a few months (Thorpe, n.d., "The Voice of the Faithful Story"). Apparently this was not the type of combined lay/hierarchy effort that the hierarchy wanted, since VOTF was banned from numerous New England parishes. The lay group spent much of its first year clarifying its identity and justifying its ties to the church.

By March 14, 2002, the USCCB's Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse (AHCSA) had been commissioned to make a preliminary study of the situation. Then, in April 2002, in an unusual gesture, the Pope called all US cardinals to Rome. In a reversal of earlier designations, the Pope described the sexual abuse of minors to be not only a sin, but a crime (*The Boston Globe* Investigative Staff, 2002, p. 5). This was a significant shift, since it opened the door for the inclusion of civil authorities in cases of abuse. By this time, the crisis had spread globally (*The Boston Globe* Investigative Staff, 2002, p. 6), and public talk swirled around a variety of issues, including the sex, marital status, and sexual orientation of priests; the training of seminarians; the Church's culture of secrecy; and the intimidation and infantilization of the laity.

On June 14, 2002, the USCCB passed the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People” by a vote of 239-13. Canonical “Essential Norms” were also passed and sent to the Vatican for *recognitio* or approval. Both Charter and Norms were revised under the direction of the Vatican, were passed by the USCCB, and received Vatican *recognitio* on December 8, 2002. During this time, the USCCB had also named a National Review Board (NRB) and created the Office of Child and Youth Protection (OCYP).

In spite of the hierarchy’s attempts to manage the crisis through the creation of committees, policies, and studies (see below), by the end of 2002, approximately 500 individuals had come forward alleging abuse and approximately 1,200 priests had been accused; further, at least six US prelates had resigned due to abuse-related issues by 2003 (*The Boston Globe*, n.d., “Scandal and Coverup”). By November 2004, the Archdioceses of Portland, Tucson, and Spokane had filed for bankruptcy in response to multimillion dollar claims levied against each of them. By June 2005, the Boston Archdiocese had paid \$150.8 million to settle sex abuse claims (Simpson, 2006). Rather than receding in response to the hierarchy’s management, the crisis seemed to grow.

In order to understand the scope of the crisis, it is helpful to turn to a series of surveys commissioned by the USCCB to track the nature and extent of the problem and to (self-) monitor the Church’s crisis management. The Gavin Group of Boston and the John Jay College of Criminal Justice were commissioned in March 2003 to conduct a “compliance audit on diocesan implementation of the *Charter*” and a descriptive analysis of the “nature and scope of the problem” respectively. Additionally, the NRB

issued a report on the crisis in February 2004. In February 2005, the second Charter compliance report was issued, which included a survey by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). This survey addressed new allegations, the accused clergy, and financial cost of managing these allegations. (Another source of information, not addressed in this study, is the AHCSA's March 2005 survey of clergy sexual abuse survivors.)

Although the research produced at the behest of the USCCB is consistently (and rightly) critiqued by other stakeholders for its bias (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests [SNAP], 2004, January 1; SNAP, 2004, December 13; VOTF, 2004, December 13; VOTF, 2005, March), it remains one of the most detailed sources for measuring the crisis. Even when one accounts for the limitations of these studies (self-report measures, internal accountability, a sometimes rigorous resistance to disclose information, time and resource constraints, etc.) they paint a sobering landscape of abuse and complicity. The following paragraphs present a brief review of the John Jay study and the 2005 Annual Survey of Allegations and Costs.

The John Jay Report, begun March 2003 and published June 2004, surveyed 195 (97%) of dioceses and 140 (100%) of religious communities in the US (pp. 16, 26). It studied the years between 1950 and 2002, and looked at the number and nature of allegations by those under 18 years of age, the status and management of the accused, characteristics of alleged victims and their abuse, and the financial impact on the Church. Of 4,392 credibly accused priests between 1950 and 2002 (approximately 4% of

active priests during the period) (pp. 26, 28), the study found that 143 (33%) faced allegations in multiple dioceses, eparchies, or religious communities (p. 57).

Although allegations were levied by 10,667 individuals during this time, it is unclear how many cases remain unreported (p. 69). Of the alleged victims, 51% were 11-14 years old, 27% were 15-17, 16% were 8-10, and nearly 6% were under 7 (p. 53). Of the total number, 81% were male and 19% female (p. 69). Whereas the police had been contacted about only 1,021 (24%) of the accused priests, 37% of alleged abusers had participated in treatment programs (pp. 60, 100). Of those reported to the police, 384 have led to criminal charges (p. 60). From the information available, the researchers calculated that 252 (6%) of all accused priests were convicted and at least 100 (2%) received prison sentences (p. 61). At the time the John Jay study was released, the total cost paid by the church exceeded \$500,000,000 (p. 105). This number continues to rise as settlements are reached around the nation.

Additional information emerges from the 2005 Annual Survey of Allegations and Costs. In 2004, The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University was commissioned by the USCCB to take an annual survey of new allegations of clergy sexual abuse and its financial impact. (CARA's survey results help comprise the USCCB's Annual Report on the Implementation of the Charter.) Tables 1-3 present the total number of allegations, victims, offenders, and costs reported to CARA by dioceses, eparchies, clerical, and religious institutes for 2004 and 2005, the only years for which this data is currently available (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2006). Table 1 shows a decrease in allegations from 2004-5. On the other hand, Table 2

shows an increase in allegation-related expenditures from 2004-5. Table 3 shows a comparison between allegation-related expenses and child protection expenses, with greater increase in settlement spending than in child protection spending. The picture that emerges through this data is that of an organization reducing its offences while increasing its financial outlay for restitution. Although this is consistent with the USCCB's overall public relations (PR) during the crisis, it is contested through the PR of other stakeholder organizations, as will become evident in the data analysis chapters.

**Table 1**  
**New Credible Allegations Reported (Source: CARA, 2006, p. 45)**

	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>Change (+/-) 2004-2005</b>
Victims	1,083	777	-306
Allegations	1,092	783	-309
Offenders	756	532	-224

**Table 2**  
**Costs Related to Allegations (Source: CARA, 2006, p. 45)**

	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>Change (+/-) 2004-2005</b>
Settlements	\$106,241,809	\$399,037,456	+\$292,795,647
Therapy for Victims	\$7,406,336	\$8,404,197	+\$997,861
Support for Offenders	\$1,869,330	\$13,669,138	+\$11,799,808
Attorneys Fees	\$36,251,445	\$41,251,640	+\$5,000,195
Other Costs	\$6,033,891	\$4,571,041	-\$1,462,850
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$157,802,811</b>	<b>\$466,933,472</b>	<b>\$309,130,661</b>

**Table 3**  
**Costs for Settlements and Child Protection (Source: CARA, 2006, p. 46)**

	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>Change (+/-) 2004-2005</b>
Settlement-related	\$157,802,811	\$466,933,472	+\$309,130,661
Child Protection Efforts	\$20,199,409	\$20,054,984	-\$144,425

As noted, numerous criticisms may be made against the rigor and trustworthiness of USCCB-sponsored research. Interestingly, even though the USCCB was ultimately responsible for each of these studies, there was marked resistance to participation by many in the hierarchy. In response to his experience trying to gather data, Governor Frank Keating, the first director of the NRB, compared members of the hierarchy to "La Cosa Nostra" (i.e., the American branch of the Mafia) due to their propensity to hide and suppress information (Paulson, 2003). In fact, conflict over this very reticence to cooperate led to Keating's resignation from the board. On one hand, critics argued that self-reports were biased in favor of the hierarchy; on the other hand, the hierarchy was markedly reticent to participate in even organizationally-controlled surveys. That the hierarchy was hesitant to participate in internal audits seems revealing. Despite this, Doyle, writing from the position as a contested expert and an insider-without, notes:

From the late 19th century into the early 21st century the church's leadership has adopted a position of secrecy and silence. They have denied the predictability of clergy sexual abuse in one form or another and have claimed that this is a phenomenon new to the post-Vatican II era. The recently published reports of the Bishops' National Review Board and John Jay College Survey have confirmed the fact of known clergy sexual abuse since the 1950's and the church leadership's consistent mishandling of individual cases. (n.d., "A Very Short History")

For Doyle, the hierarchy is incriminated by its own biased research.

Be that as it may, the data presented in these reports, the chronology presented by the USCCB, the overview of the crisis constructed by *The Boston Globe*, and Doyle's historical overview of sex abuse in the Church (each a source for this section) give some indication of the scope of the case. Given the (admittedly limited) overview presented in this chapter, it is clear that systemic clergy sexual abuse is a crisis for the (US) Catholic Church. As such, it has provoked a crisis communication from the USCCB as well as a variety of other organizations. In order to understand the lens through which this study views the crisis discourse, it is important to present a brief rationale for the analytical perspective taken by this dissertation. The next section does so.

### **The Perspective**

As mentioned in the opening section, this dissertation takes a dialogical perspective on crisis communication. This perspective emerges from a central tension between *strategic* and *dialogic* approaches to PR (Leitch & Neilson, 2001, p. 128). This tension is also indicated by Grunig's (1989) distinction between instrumental (i.e., asymmetrical) and reciprocal (i.e., symmetrical) models of PR (in Leeper, 2001, p. 99). Although strategic (i.e., instrumental, asymmetric) approaches dominate the field (Gandy, 1992; Leitch & Neilson, 2001, p. 128), dialogic (i.e., reciprocal, asymmetric) approaches offer a substantive alternative approach (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 180; Leeper, 2001, p. 99; Leitch & Neilson, 2001, p. 128). Strategic approaches to PR emphasize the consumption of organizational messages by targeted publics; dialogic approaches depict an equal discursive interaction between an organization and 'its'

publics (Leitch & Neilson, 2001, p. 128). In both models, however, the organization is given the subject position; publics are understood from this perspective (Leitch & Neilson, 2001, p. 128). The result is a bias toward an ‘organizational perspective’ throughout the literature (Leitch & Neilson, 2001). Thus, although extant approaches to crisis communication are illuminating, they are generally limited to the perspective of a single dominant organization (Leitch & Neilson, 2001, pp. 128-9).

Interestingly, this is as true for extant dialogical approaches to PR as it is for strategic approaches (Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Leitch & Neilson, 2001; McKie, 2001). This is an unfortunate state of affairs, since dialogic approaches have the potential to reveal a more nuanced understanding of the co-construction of public relations discourse than do strategic approaches. According to Cheney and Christensen (2001), an uncritical application of extant symmetrical models may unintentionally lead to corporatism (p. 181). This would occur when organizational decision makers invite strategic stakeholders into exclusive dialogues (p. 181). Further, Leitch and Neilson (2001) argue that even Grunig’s symmetrical model of PR is a strategic organizational choice; by obscuring power and failing to differentiate conceptually between an organization and a public, this model fails to offer any ethical advantage to asymmetrical models (p. 129).

By obscuring the communicative complexities and power dynamics of crisis management, an organization-centered orientation to crisis communication compounds what might be called PR’s *managerial-egalitarian paradox*. This paradox is anchored between the espoused egalitarian ideal and consistent managerial bias of PR scholarship



and practice. It emerges where PR research uncritically advances managerial interests while glossing over inherent power divides between organizations and their publics. This study argues that challenging the managerial-egalitarian paradox of PR requires a fundamental shift away from the organization-centered perspective undergirding traditional approaches to crisis communication. Again, it is essential to note that even ‘dialogical’ models of PR such as Grunig’s two-way symmetrical model fail to engage the polyvocal interactivity of PR. As such, they are nominally dialogical. In order to understand public relations as a contested communicative process, this dissertation offers a more developed (yet still contestable) notion of a dialogical framework for PR research.

By crafting a more rigorous dialogical framework, it is possible to fundamentally challenge the managerial bias in PR research. Rather than describing crisis communication from the perspective of the source organization, a dialogical perspective takes an inclusive perspective. Rather than arguing that only those with ‘actual’ power speak into an emergent crisis and thus dismissing or downplaying non-dominant voices, this perspective listens to the asymmetrical polyvocality of crisis communication. This in turn opens the door to a more complex understanding of how participants seek to control one another and influence the unfolding crisis through the generation of public relations discourse. Key here is acknowledging how the polyphony of voices in crisis PR discursively manages power.

An extended dialogical perspective also makes it possible to challenge the idealism of public relations scholarship. Rather than prescribing strategic best practices,

this study traces how PR functions in the clergy abuse crisis. Rather than promoting dialogue as a linear, rational model for PR practitioners, this study uses dialogue as a lens through which the fluid, open, constitutive nature of PR is revealed. As a descriptive approach to PR, a dialogical assessment of crisis communication illuminates actual PR discourse in such a way that challenges the idealism of prescriptive approaches to public relations practice. Key here is listening to the complexity of public relations discourse.

Thus, in order to offset the linked limitations of managerialism and idealism in public relations, this study challenges and extends the predominant ‘dialogical’ model of PR. In so doing, it responds to Cheney and Christensen’s (2001) call for a critical assessment of “so-called two-way symmetrical systems” (p. 181). In order to illuminate the communicative complexities of crisis communication, this study seeks to apply an extended dialogical framework to analyze a crisis situation. As Cheney and Christensen (2001) write: “As we contemplate both the utility and the further development of the two-way symmetrical model, we must take a more realistic view of power and adopt a full appreciation of the postmodernist challenges to the idea of rational dialogue” (p. 181).

### **The Document**

Before applying a dialogical framework to the crisis communication generated in the clergy abuse crisis, it is necessary to map the terrain of public relations, crisis communication, and dialogue research. To that end, Chapter II introduces the scholarly domain of public relations, focusing on its historical development, its atheoretical nature, and its treatment of communication. Chapter III focuses on crisis communication as a

subset of public relations. In this chapter, extant approaches to crisis scholarship are reviewed, forming the backdrop for the current approach. Chapter IV reviews the broad and complex literature on dialogue. Here, the goal is to trace the schools of thought in dialogue scholarship from which the conceptualization of dialogue used in this study emerges. Chapter V reviews the study's methodology, tracing both the study's approach to theorizing practice and the research process.

Chapter VI and VII are data analysis chapters. Six traces the data at a macro level by assessing each stakeholder organization's discursive presence across time, general orientations to dialogic terms, and stakeholder contextualizations of the crisis. Seven presents a micro approach to the data by comparing initiative/response patterns to offensive/defensive orientations, (non)topicality, and enabling/constraining responses. This level of focus gives way to a broader perspective on the study in Chapter VIII. Here, the emergent framework and research process are restated in a more coherent fashion. The goal here is capturing the analysis in a way that it might be further developed in other studies. Additionally, implications for both crisis communication scholarship and the clergy abuse case are presented, as are limitations of this study and areas for future research.

The overarching goal of this study is to theorize a dialogical framework for understanding the communicative construction of crises. Such an orientation to crisis communication is seen as an essential extension of extant public relations scholarship, the topic of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **A REVIEW OF PUBLIC RELATIONS**

In order to contextualize the current study, it is essential to review three scholarly domains: public relations, crisis communication, and dialogue. The literature on public relations and crisis communication illuminate the communicative domain to be studied; the literature on dialogue illuminates the epistemological framework driving the data analysis. Since crisis communication is a type of public relations, it makes sense to open the study with an overview of PR.

This chapter opens with a brief argument for the communicative nature of public relations. Next, a review of the historical development of the field is presented, which leads to a review of an important, yet contested model of PR. Some limitations of PR scholarship are drawn from these reviews, and lead to a discussion of the role of theory in public relations scholarship. The chapter concludes by tracing the interplay between the disciplines of public relations and organizational communication, paving the way for a review of the literature on crisis communication.

#### **Public Relations as Communicative**

PR is, by origin and definition, communicative. It has its origins in mass communication and journalism (Heath, 2001b, p. 2), and may be defined as “the management of communications between an organization and its publics” (Hainsworth & Meng, 1988, p. 21). More particularly, PR is the management of organizational identity, image, and issues through various channels including news releases, press releases/statements, press conferences, press kits, and events. It engages a variety of

audiences including organizational members, community members, shareholders/investors, the media, special publics, and/or consumers. It is comprised of internal, external, and boundary-spanning communication. It draws on communication that is face-to-face, written, and technologically mediated. It can be mapped on axes of proactivity-reactivity and defensiveness-offensiveness. It is premised on the need to influence meaning-making, agenda-setting, and/or policy-making. It is a site of contest and a means through which power is enacted and resisted. It may be analyzed, as any communication is, according to direction, channel, style, content, relational components, recursivity, chronology, context, etc. Clearly, public relations is enacted discursively.

Despite the essentially communicative nature of public relations, PR scholarship has traditionally drawn on relatively unsophisticated transmissional understandings of communication (not unlike other areas of early communication research), as a review of its historic development shows. Although it might be critiqued as an artificially coherent narrative of the development of the field (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 168), Cheney and Vibbert's (1987) assessment offers a succinct historical review sufficient for contextualizing the current discussion. It forms the basis of the following section.

### **Public Relations' Historic Development**

Although, according to Grunig and Hunt (1984), the U.S. first press agents appeared in the mid-1800s, public relations did not become a named organizational process until the late 1880s (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987, pp. 166-167). Cheney and Vibbert (1987) describe the U.S.'s earliest public relations as "a curative response to unfavorable public opinion ... *the public defense of actions*" (p. 167). Here, PR is clearly defensive

and retrospective. In this nascent stage, American public relations “consisted primarily of publicity generated to blunt the attack of another, with a somewhat wary eye focused on both the public and the activity adopted to reach them” (p. 168).

This focus on defensive publicity was influenced by a shift toward propaganda in the 1920s (p. 168). At this time, the work of PR practitioners (defending an organization to its publics) began to be augmented by the work of PR scholars (informing PR practice with scientific principles). This served to institutionalize PR by adding a focus on rationality and control to organizational defense (pp. 168-169). Although PR researchers began drawing information from publics for their research, it was generally one-way communication that served organizational ends.

The emergence of public relations as a profession followed 30 years later (p. 171). By the 1960s, public relations became more visible (by entering common social discourse), yet more exclusive (by relying increasingly on private lobbying and links with highly segmented and targeted publics) (p. 172). According to Cheney and Vibbert, this shift was set in a dynamic social context (c.f., the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, economic shifts) in which the mass media was vilified and lobbying became a common PR function. This marks the advent of the advocacy function of public relations (p. 173).

By the 1970s, PR was seen as a type of public policy management (p. 173). Both the concept of advocacy and that of public policy management indicate another key shift in public relations. To its publicity and defensive functions was added a proactive involvement in larger social processes. This function may play out as image

management or issue management. However, despite the potential of this new angle to challenge PR's bias toward the 'source organization,' it largely continued to be viewed from the position of the source organization. Ultimately, social involvement in the public sphere became another avenue for advancing organizational goals.

Bringing their overview of public relations to the 1980s, Cheney and Vibbert (1987) posit that PR "addresses the margins of overlap between an organization and its publics in distinctive and strategic ways" (p. 173). McKie (2001) argues that such an emphasis on organizational strategy (from the Greek *strategia* or *generalship*) emphasizes that which is done "out of sight of the enemy [and] ... points to ongoing assumptions...about the adversarial nature of communication with publics" (p. 77). Cheney and Vibbert's conceptualization of PR as an essentially communicative function in which organizational actors "attempt ... to control the ways internal and external environments discuss such key concepts as values, issues, images, and identities" (p. 173) seems to carry McKie's point. Although a diversity of stakeholders or publics is relevant in Cheney and Vibbert's view, organizational control remains the main goal of public relations. As conceptualized to this point, PR is clearly bounded by managerialism and a bias toward the source organization. This makes sense, given the (neo)classical (i.e., functionalist) underpinnings of the field (Botan, 1997, p. 195; Trujillo & Toth, 1987, pp. 204, 208). This dissertation argues that both of these biases, rather than inherent to PR, stem from a monological orientation to the practice of public relations (Botan, 1997, pp. 195-6).

### **Grunig's Model of Two-Way Symmetrical PR**

An attempt to challenge to the traditional orientation undergirding the PR literature comes from Grunig et al's research (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 652). From his early categorizations of synchronic and diachronic PR communication, Grunig (1984) developed four models of PR practice: the press agency/publicity model, the public information model, the two-way asymmetrical model, and the two-way symmetrical model. These models were then used by Grunig and Hunt (1984) to trace the historical development of PR in the United States and to typify contemporary PR practice (Grunig, 2001, p. 11).

The first two models represent one-way approaches to public relations, that is, "the dissemination of information from organizations to publics, usually through the media" (Grunig & Grunig, 1992, p. 288). By applying emerging principles of social science to PR, Freud's nephew Edward Bernays (inadvertently) opened the possibility of two-way public relations. In order to generate scientific principles of PR, practitioners exchange information with publics (Grunig & Grunig, 1992, p. 288). The shift led to two-way asymmetrical models, in which the organization and its publics were connected through an imbalanced relationship. The goal here is using research to "identify attitudes and to develop messages that appeal to those attitudes that persuade publics to behave as the organization wants" (Grunig, 1993). Thus, while this model is relational, it is not dialogic. Two-way communication is uncritically applied to advance organizational ends.



The fourth model of public relations identified by Grunig and Hunt (1984) is two-way symmetrical. In this model, the goal is mutual understanding between an organization and its publics rather than unidirectional persuasion (Grunig & Grunig, 1992, p. 289). This model presumes that achieving the goal of mutual understanding requires an exchange of communication between an organization and its publics. For Grunig and Grunig (2000), publics are stakeholders (those who are affected by or can affect an organization) who are aware and/or active. Publics merit organizational communication to the degree they: perceive themselves as involved with an organization's actions, conceptualize an organization's actions as problematic, and are unconstrained in responding to an organization (Grunig & Grunig, 2000, p. 312).

According to Grunig (2001), symmetrical PR occurs “where groups come together to protect and enhance their self-interests. Argumentation, debate, and persuasion take place. But dialogue, listening, understanding, and relationship building also occur because they are more effective in resolving conflict than are one-way attempts at compliance gaining” (p. 18). In this model, Grunig attempts to challenge the fundamental conceptualization of managerially biased public relations. Although the shift to an inclusive view of PR practices is important, and paves the way for more rigorous interpretive or cocreational, (e.g., dialogic) approaches to PR (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 652), Grunig's model is rightfully critiqued on several accounts, two of which are reviewed below.

First, despite Grunig's disclaimer that he “never viewed the two-way symmetrical model as one of pure cooperation or of total accommodation of a public's

interests” (2001, p. 12), this model fails to fully problematize the prioritization of an organization over ‘its’ publics. The emphasis on strategic PR (Grunig 2001, p. 13; Grunig & Grunig, 2000) indicates a bias toward organizational ends. Part of the dilemma here is the failure to adequately engage the disparate enactment of power between an organization and ‘its’ publics. This criticism has been noted by a variety of critical scholars; Grunig himself (2001) cites Dozier and Lauzen (1998), Kersten (1994), and L’Etang (1996) as critics on this point (pp.16-18). Key here is the reality that organizations and ‘their’ publics have differential access to resources, communicative and otherwise. Working from a similar assumption, German (1995) goes so far as to argue that corporate communication with publics can only be monological (p. 293; in McKie, 2001, p. 77). The contention here is that PR is a communication phenomenon in which organizations use persuasion to gain their own advantage at the expense of their publics, so to dub it ‘symmetrical’ serves a hegemonic end.

Although the two-way symmetrical model does not inherently disallow power, it obscures it. At best, it is hastily mentioned as a hindrance to collaboration or as a reason for sketching a normative theory of activist PR (Grunig, 2001, p. 14; Grunig & Grunig, 1992, p. 319). At worst, it is portrayed as off-set by the countervailing power available to activist publics through media advocacy, litigation, legislation, and regulation (Grunig, 2001, p. 18). Stating that “many public relations practitioners believe their organizations have lost control to activist groups,” Grunig implies that the power disparity may actually hang in favor of organized publics (2001, p. 18). In situations such as the clergy sexual abuse crisis, such an assumption is dangerous where it risks faulting victims

while portraying perpetrators as victims. Were one to analyze the clergy sex abuse crisis through the lens of the two-way model, the only communication which would be audible would be those instances which the Roman Catholic Church (as the ‘source’ organization) strategically engages or acknowledges. In this way, it would silence unacknowledged discourse being produced by salient publics and discourse being produced in alternative arenas.

Second, the two-way symmetric model plays into the idealism of PR. After carefully distinguishing between a positive model (i.e., descriptive) and a normative model (i.e., prescriptive), Grunig categorizes his model as normative. Interestingly, Grunig rebuts criticisms that this (ideal) model is idealistic (Grunig, 2001, pp. 16-20). Even if some of Grunig’s critics have oversimplified his model (Grunig, 2001), it is intended to function as a recommended best practice. Reasoning backwards from Grunig’s recommendation that public relations *ought to be* symmetrical, one can infer that enacted PR is *not necessarily* symmetrical. Reasoning backwards from the assumption that ‘excellent’ organizations practice symmetrical PR, one can infer that not all organizations practice symmetrical PR. Even advocates of Grunig’s model admit it is bounded by the source organization (PR agency versus corporation), the culture (USA versus China), the history and technological savvy of an organization, and the reality of mixed motives (self versus other) (Hon, 2007, pp. 13-15).

Inasmuch as it fails to challenge the managerial-egalitarian paradox in PR scholarship, the two-way symmetrical model is insufficient for understanding the nuances of a case like the clergy sex abuse crisis. At the most basic level, it would

obscure the power disparity among stakeholder organizations. By restricting its attention to stakeholders deemed strategic by the source organization, it may overlook key stakeholders. This, in turn, would obscure how stakeholders respond to an organization's determination of their strategic worth (i.e., whether they are worth engaging or not). It would also paint over the tactics stakeholders use to challenge the source organization's crisis management. This model also fails to distinguish between authentic attempts to create communicative symmetry and attempts to create the appearance of symmetrical PR (i.e., image management).

Thus, while Grunig's model has advanced and challenged PR research, it fails to engage the communicative complexities of enacted public relations discourse. In continuing to challenge the functionalist presumptions of PR, researchers must attend to marginalized voices and alternative truths in crisis communication (Tyler, 2005, p. 567). They must also recognize the power embedded in treating managers as innocent victims, in the organizational goal of quick closure, in foregrounding a single organizational voice, and in seeking situational control; the function of polyvocality and dissent and the ethical implications of particular responses to suffering have yet to be addressed (Tyler, 2005, p. 567).

### **Limitations in Public Relations Scholarship**

More generally, in constructing more nuanced understandings of PR, it may be helpful to consider three challenges facing PR scholarship. First, as PR has become institutionalized and professionalized, it has uncritically privileged the source organization. From the early days of publicity to the pursuit of scientific principles to the

recommendation of two-way symmetry, the source organization has not been challenged as the primary focus or agent of public relations. When publics are considered, they are considered in relation to, and from the perspective of, the source organization (Botan, 1997, p. 196; Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 651; Leichty & Warner, 2001, p. 61; Leitch & Neilson, 2001, p. 127). They are, in essence, made Other, and viewed from the standpoint of the source organization. The assumption that public relations discourse flows from an organization to ‘its’ publics obscures the reality that multiple organizations discursively contribute to many PR situations. The result is that “public relations theory has been unable to come to terms with the power relationships between discourse participants or with ethical issues relating to power differentials” (Leitch & Neilson, 2001, p. 127).

For example, Martin and Boynton’s (2005) study of NASA’s crisis communication following the *Challenger* and *Columbia* tragedies looks for evidence of NASA’s communication with its stakeholders. However, stakeholder voices are absent from the research, as is any critical assessment of NASA’s crisis management goals. In his (2004) assessment of West Pharmaceutical’s facility explosion, Coombs offers “a set of guidelines for crisis managers looking to protect their reputational assets” (p. 467) without problematizing the goal of organizational self-protection or exploring competing goals. Sellnow, Ulmer, and Snider’s (1998) review of the 1994 salmonella outbreak at Schwan explores the link between taking corrective action and restoring an organization’s image without addressing the response of victims to corrective action or the ethical implications of engaging corrective action for the purpose of image

restoration. Even in Wise's (2004) assessment of Chicago's response to a deadly nightclub stampede, the only contrary voice comes from media. It is fascinating that stakeholders are marginalized in a discussion of the strategic use of attribution versus compassion. Although there has been some treatment of PR from critical perspectives (see Toth & Heath 1992; Trujillo & Toth, 1987), a fundamental reconceptualization of PR as a contested practice has yet to take hold. One response to this challenge is decentering the (notion of the) source organization.

Second, much PR research fails to offer a sufficiently complex understanding of communicative interactivity. The important distinction between one- and two-way communication notwithstanding, PR research frequently obscures the nuances of communication. Early models discounted interaction entirely, relying on "an overly narrow view of communication as a one-way and primarily downward conduit" (Trujillo & Toth, 1987, p. 204). Later, two-way models are better, addressing "communication as a two-way process involving various channels (upward, downward, and horizontal) and various media" (Trujillo & Toth, 1987, p. 204). Even these models, however offer a simplistically linear view of communication, often implicating bi-directional one-way communication. As Cheney and Christensen (2001) note, strategic organizational communication "narrows down the notions of dialogue, symmetry, and responsiveness to specifically circumscribed and manageable encounters between the organization and select publics" (p. 181). Oversimplifying PR communication obscures how multiple organizations collaboratively and conflictually co-construct PR. According to Kent and Taylor (1998), fully understanding symmetrical communication requires an

understanding of dialogic communication (p. 323), which they conceptualize as a negotiated intersubjectivity (p. 325). Key to managing this challenge is analyzing public relations discourse in a polyvocal context.

Third, the extant literature on PR fails to address the gap between the ideal of symmetry and the reality of asymmetry (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 180). Offering a ‘symmetrical’ relationship between an organization and those it deems key public(s) may in fact obscure how power disparities between an organization and ‘its’ publics are managed. As Leitch and Neilson (2001) note, discourse symmetry requires more than a “willingness to listen to publics and to adapt one’s behavior as a consequence of this interaction” (p. 129). Where there is an unequal access to resources, there is asymmetry (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 180). According to McKie (2001), PR needs to look beyond simplistic notions of two-way symmetry to consider “complex force fields of multiple competing powers in the real world” (p. 84). Although critics deem it hegemonically asymmetrical (i.e., an organization unilaterally using its power to pursue its goals) and proponents tout it as idealistically symmetrical (i.e., organizations inviting stakeholders into mutually beneficial relationships), PR hangs somewhere in the balance. As the discussion of Grunig’s two-way symmetrical model shows, a normative theory of PR serves to compound rather than elucidate the problem. The problems that come from either overstating or under-specifying symmetry are compounded “by the complete absence of the concept of power in mainstream public relations theory” (Leitch & Neilson, 2001, p. 128; see also Coombs, 1993). One way to ensure a balanced perspective is employing a descriptive analysis of PR.

Although there are a myriad of challenges to be managed in any area of research, these three are key for any communication-based analysis of PR. By analyzing *how* PR communication functions, it is possible to articulate a model of PR which describes how multiple organizations construct a PR situation across power divides. The model presented here decenters the source organization by attending to the polyvocality and power dynamics of public relations discourse. In particular, this dissertation advances a more complex understanding of how PR functions by addressing how a variety of stakeholder organizations interactively co-construct a crisis. In so doing, it extends the line of research begun by numerous researchers working from interpretive and critical frameworks. In particular, it follows on the heels of Botan (1997), Botan and Hazelton (1989), Botan and Taylor (2004), Kent and Taylor (1998 & 2002), Pearson (1989), and others addressing the potential of a dialogic theory of PR.

Given the goal of further articulating the dialogic theory of PR, it is essential to understand how theory functions in PR scholarship. This is the subject of the next section.

### **Public Relations' Theoretical Framework**

While there is a fairly robust literature to guide public relations practitioners, its theoretic foundation is less than robust. According to Cheney and Christensen (2001), PR “grew out of a highly practical context and subsequently developed a theoretical apparatus to support the analysis and legitimation of its professional activity” (p. 167). Leitch and Neilson (2001) agree, noting, “The needs of the public relations profession have, to a large extent, driven the development of public relations as an academic



discipline” (p. 127). Given this developmental sequence, it is important that PR’s theoretical agenda should not simply follow social-political trends (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 167) or be restricted by a focus on current exigencies (Leitch & Neilson, 2001, p. 127). Instead, theory development ought to be as evocative and enlightening as it is responsive to professional and social trends (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, pp. 167-168).

A survey of the literature, however, indicates that PR is remiss in theory development. Although PR scholars have allocated numerous social science theories, “there is no public relations theory” (Leeper, 2001, p. 93; see also Grunig, 1989). This challenge constrains research in both the US and in Europe (Moss, Verčič, & Warnaby, 2000, p. 2). Taking a rather diplomatic stance, Botan and Taylor (2004) argue that theory is present, yet underdeveloped in PR research (p. 659). Cropp and Pincus (2001) describe PR theory as fragmented, noting that “scholars have generated an assortment of theories and models that, when taken together, show public relations as a field comprised of a constellation of separate and linked subfields, perspectives, roles, and purposes” (p. 193). Whether describing PR theory as absent, fragmented, or underdeveloped, these researchers each problematize extant PR theory.

### **Theoretic Bases**

In order to contextualize the need for continued development of PR theory, it is important to review some ways in which public relations scholars have applied theory to date. Despite (or perhaps because of) the shortage of original PR theories and the lack of a covering PR theory, PR scholars frequently allocate theories from other disciplines.

Just a few of the theories (generated or borrowed) include: apologia theory, image restoration theory, communitarianism, stakeholder theory, game theory, chaos theory, ‘new science,’ complexity theory, role theory, situational theory, and a variety of feminist theories. At a time when PR was dominated by functionalist understandings, Trujillo and Toth (1987) drew on organizational theory to argue that PR research and practice should be informed by functionalist, interpretive and critical perspectives (p. 204). Then, in 1992, Ehling, White, and Grunig cited four major conceptual systems undergirding PR scholarship: inter-organizational theory, management and decision theory, communication theory, and conflict resolution theory (in Moss, Verčič, & Warnaby, 2000, p. 3).

At the same time, Toth (1992) explored how systems, rhetorical, and critical perspectives reveal complementary conceptualizations of public relations. Systems perspectives have been predominant in recent decades, since they undergird Grunig’s paradigmatic theory (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 659; Toth, 1992, p. 3; Trujillo & Toth, 1987, p. 207). From a systems perspective, PR is a subsystem of the organization (Trujillo & Toth, 1987, p. 207), and attention to the environment is paramount (Toth, 1992, p. 8). Interviews and surveys are common research tools in this perspective (Toth, 1992, p. 10). From this theoretical perspective, PR serves to “coordinate and integrate the various subsystems that constitute the organization and, more important, to reduce uncertainty about the environment in order to help the organization adapt to (and grow in) that environment” (Trujillo & Toth, 1987, p. 208). What is missing in much of this scholarship is a rigorous treatment of communication (Toth, 1992, pp. 3, 9).

Offsetting this deficit is the substantive work on rhetorical perspectives of PR (e.g., Heath 1992; Heath 2001a; Toth, 2000). A 1978 Supreme Court ruling brought this line of theorizing to bear by reconceptualizing corporations as rhetors (Toth, 2000, p. 130). Rhetorical analyses of PR frequently focus on values, issues, identities, and images (Toth, 2000, p. 130), assess mass media accounts and public records, and draw on the work of Burke (Toth, 1992, pp. 5-6). According to Toth (1992), the goal of rhetorical approaches to PR is “to evaluate or criticize the effectiveness of organizational messages as successfully advocating organizational stances” (p. 6).

An emphasis on evaluation is central to critical perspectives on PR. In this theoretical approach, scholars seek to “disrupt our beliefs about organizations” (Toth, 1992, p. 7) and explore how PR is a vehicle for power and social influence (Trujillo & Toth, 1987, p. 218). Work from this theoretic tradition explores whose interest is served by public relations communication, and frequently uses written messages or values as units of analysis (Toth, 1992, p. 7). Key here are explorations of how PR practitioners use the tools of their trade to influence social bodies (Cutlip, 1980, in Trujillo & Toth, 1987, p. 218) or systematically distort communication (Deetz, 1982, in Trujillo & Toth, 1987, p. 219). Important to this theoretic perspective is a critical examination of ideologies driving PR practice (Olasky, 1985, in Trujillo & Toth, 1987, p. 220).

According to Botan and Taylor (2004), the field has seen an increasing use of ‘cocreational’ theories (e.g., the symmetrical/excellence theory, coorientation theory, accommodation theory, and dialogue theory) in the past decade. The use of these theories marks a key shift in how scholars conceptualize PR communication, from a

functional to a cocreational activity (p. 652). It remains to be seen which cocreationist model will emerge “as the most useful, the most theoretically valuable, and perhaps, the one that situates public relations theory as a foundational member of the field of communication” (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 659). To date, communication centered theories allocated by PR scholars have been drawn from interpersonal, organizational, mass media, group, and cultural/critical communication research.

In addition to addressing the theoretic perspectives of PR research, it may be helpful to note that PR scholars address theory at multiple levels. Botan and Hazleton (1989) categorize public relations theory on three levels: metatheoretic, theoretic, and applied (in Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 649). This may be compared to Littlejohn’s (1992) three levels of theory: metatheoretic, hypothetical, and descriptive. Leeper (2001) describes Littlejohn’s metatheoretic level as addressing basic assumptions, his hypothetical level as constructing pictures of reality or frameworks for knowledge, and his descriptive level as centering on operations and findings (p. 93). According to Botan and Hazelton (1989), researchers must recognize the metatheoretic assumptions of their projects before engaging theoretic alternatives (p. 7; in Leeper, 2001, p. 93). Grunig (1989) concurs, arguing that metatheoretical considerations precede development in the practice (p. 17; in Leeper, 2001, p. 96). Botan and Taylor (2004) augment the focus on driving theoretical assumptions with a focus on the contexts and methodological lenses that affect the adoption of a particular theory or theoretical perspective (p. 651). This paves the way for the current study, which uses a case study (i.e., applied level) to map

and test a particular dialogical epistemology (i.e., metatheoretical level) for understanding crisis communication.

The following brief review of two approaches to PR theory further illustrates the interconnection among the levels of theory.

### **Theoretic Case Analyses**

Although scholars distinguish between theoretic and applied levels, PR research often folds those into one frame. This coincides with Barge and Craig's (in press) contention that theory may be used to conceptualize practice. The plethora of case studies in public relations reveals this to be a popular choice. Although it may be more typical to apply one theory to a case, an interesting alternative to theoretic case analyses is offered by Sellnow and Seeger (2001), who advocate using multiple theoretical models in one study. In this approach, researchers explore the explanatory power of various theories in one analytical frame. By applying several theories to one case, researchers can approach public relations cases on a more complex, nuanced level than they might otherwise. According to Sellnow and Seeger (2001), "multiple methods are necessary for building a complete understanding of ... broad-based, complex, and dynamic events" (p. 164). In particular, they say it takes the dynamic interplay of various theoretical perspectives to foreground "the important interactive features of crisis" (p. 165). They argue that more simplistic, unitary analyses fail to challenge the status quo, and fail to "account for the multifaceted role of communication in crisis planning and recovery" which, in turn, denies "both victims and potential victims the understandings necessary to deal more successfully with these powerful events" (p. 166).

In an exemplar study for this approach, Sellnow and Seeger (2001) draw on chaos theory, retrospective sensemaking, crisis communication logistics, and apologia to study the Red River Valley Flood crisis. Their analysis illustrates the flexible, sophisticated understanding of crisis events that can emerge when multiple theoretic perspectives are used in concert. Although Sellnow and Seeger stop short of reconnecting the findings to a more complex and nuanced theoretical framework of crisis communication, their approach opens the door for combating the theoretic fragmentation of public relations. In order to move beyond a case study approach (no matter how rich), it is essential that researchers tease out more fundamental metatheoretical implications of their findings. This role of theory is discussed next.

### **Metatheoretic Analyses**

Rather than using multiple particular theories to illuminate practice, some researchers assess how a variety of metatheoretical approaches illuminate public relations scholarship. By moving beyond individual case studies, metatheoretic analyses explore processes basic to public relations, thus potentially expanding conceptualizations of the domain. Rather than advocating the creation of new models or frameworks, researchers working from this perspective argue that the next step for theorizing PR is to set extant perspectives in conversation with one another, exploring where they contrast and where they augment one another. As opposed to theoretic case analyses which can be accomplished in one study, this approach requires a secondary (or meta) level analysis. That is, it requires the application of a diversity of theoretical models in individual studies. Sets of such studies are then assessed for essential complementarity

across theoretical perspectives. This illustrates the interplay between theory and metatheory, with theoretic analyses being sifted against one another to tease out metatheoretic orientations of the discipline.

As mentioned, a good example of this approach to theory development is Toth's (1992) exploration of how systems, rhetorical, and critical perspectives reveal complementary conceptualizations of public relations. Although Toth delineates the distinctions among the three perspectives, she argues that they are increasingly able to offer complementary rather than competing insights into public relations. By sifting the three perspectives against one another, Toth determines that rhetorical and critical researchers need to clarify the theoretic underpinnings of their research in order to be salient to the field (p. 12). She also determines that rhetorical and critical scholars stand poised to add a much richer conceptualization of communication to the field than systems scholars have articulated (p. 12).

An interesting assumption of Toth's approach is the sufficiency of existing theoretical models for PR. Toth asserts that what is lacking is simply an exploration of how extant theories interact. Researchers pointing towards a new paradigm in PR scholarship (e.g., Botton & Taylor, 2004; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Leeper, 2001) seem to challenge this presumption. Although cross-paradigmatic meta-analyses such as Toth's are an important way to illuminate commonalities in the field, they should not be taken as a substitute for theory development. Be that as it may, clearly both theoretic case analyses and metatheoretic analyses are important tools as researchers continue to theorize PR practice.

### **Engaging a Potential Paradigm for PR Theory**

According to McKie (2001), PR theory has been slow to develop for three major reasons: “outmoded ideas of science (especially reductionism) ... an associated quantitative methodology, and ... scientific management” (p. 80). Moss, Verčič, and Warnaby (2000) cite the “multi-disciplinary roots and boundaries of modern public relations theory and practice” as a confounding factor in attempts to demarcate a “distinctive body of knowledge in public relations” (p. 2). Regardless of the reason, there is clearly much room yet to theorize public relations practice. Leeper (2001) notes that the general desire for a PR theory continues to fuel “an ongoing discussion among scholars as to which possible paradigm would be most valuable as a unifying theory” (p. 93). At the same time, it is possible to question the need for a unifying theory.

This dissertation enters the ongoing discussion by exploring the potential of a particular dialogic perspective on crisis communication. A dialogic perspective threads (although in a contested form) through the reigning paradigm of PR (i.e., Grunig’s excellence theory), and has been offered as a potential new paradigm for the field (Boton & Taylor, 2004, p. 659; Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 33). According to Kent and Taylor (2002), although a dialogic theory of PR is the “next stage of public relations theory development,” additional theoretical issues in dialogue have yet to be articulated (p. 33). In response, this dissertation crafts a dialogic model for analyzing actual PR discourse.

As will be explained in Chapter V, this study theorizes practice by taking a grounded practical theory approach to public relations discourse. This speaks to the ongoing need to theorize practice by exploring how a dialogical epistemology might



illuminate the discursive construction of a crisis. In offering a particular dialogic model of crisis communication, this study does not offer a recommended practice. It offers a mechanism for tracing the specific communicative strategies used by an organization and its stakeholders in a crisis situation. That is, the model presented here is descriptive rather than strategic, offering a mechanism for teasing out ways in which discourses interact to alternately extend, challenge, shape, alter, control, or steer an unfolding crisis. This offers a mechanism for illuminating the communicative practices of organizations which are *not* practicing ideal (or ‘excellent’) communication, since this is where most learning takes place.

In order to contextualize the analysis, however, it is necessary to narrow the focus to the particular type of public relations practice most salient to the clergy abuse case: crisis communication. The next chapter reviews the literature on crisis communication.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **CRISES AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION**

The preceding review of PR's history and theoretical basis sets the stage for an assessment of the type of PR most salient to the clergy abuse case: crisis communication. Whereas researchers position public relations as a general process of adjusting an organization to its environment, crisis communication is described as an organization's (internal and external) response to an unexpected and damaging event. As such, crisis communication is a subset of public relations. In order to understand the nuances of crisis communication, one must first understand the nature of an organizational crisis.

#### **Conceptualizing Organizational Crises**

In general, given the word's etymology, a crisis might be defined as a turning point or a point of decision (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003, p. 7). A fairly representative conceptualization is offered by Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (1998) who describe an organizational crisis as "a specific, unexpected and non-routine organizationally based event or series of events which creates high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organization's high priority goals" (p. 233; in Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003, p. 7). A more general perspective is offered by Carroll (1991), who sees crises as emotionally driven incidents that may engender turning points (p. 492; in Marcus & Goodman, 1991, p. 284). According to Fink (1986), a crisis is marked by public scrutiny, high intensity, image-threats, and/or financial threats (in Penrose, 2000, p. 157). According to Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (2003), a crisis "evokes a sense of threat, urgency, and destruction" (p. 4). Further, crises have ambiguous meanings and

outcomes (Penrose, 2000, p. 157; Sellnow & Seeger, 2001, p. 155, Ulmer & Sellnow, 1997, p. 216).

More specifically, Marcus and Goodman (1991) describe crises according to their causes and their effect on victims (p. 284). Using these two factors, the authors articulate three types of crises: accidents, scandals, and product safety incidents (p. 281). In this view, accidents have concrete victims and high levels of deniability; scandals have diffuse victims and low levels of deniability; and product safety and health incidents have moderately identifiable victims and moderate deniability (p. 265). Further conceptual distinctions among the three types of crises are listed in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
**Typology of Crises (Source: Marcus & Goodman, 1991)**

	<b>Accident</b>	<b>Product Safety/Health Incidents</b>	<b>Scandal</b>
<b>Deniability</b>	High deniability	Moderate deniability	Low deniability
<b>Victims</b>	Clear victim pool	Disputed victim pool	Diffuse victim pool
<b>Event</b>	Discrete event	Repeated events	Not a discrete event
<b>Cause</b>	Due to system properties	Due to faulty or dangerous product	Due to human or organizational errors

Although this typology is helpful in understanding some basic characteristics of crises, it is limited. It obscures organizational type (i.e., sector, industry), the enactment and contestation of power, the evolution of crises across time, potential distinctions among victims, and the contested emergence of stakeholders. The limitations in this

typology highlight the boundaries of early crisis definitions, and point to ways in which current understandings of crisis communication need to be expanded.

Traditionally, crises have been viewed as specific, time-bound events which threaten an organization, thus requiring a rapid response to reassert organizational control (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 156). In this fairly narrow view, the responsibility of public relations practitioners is the speedy dissemination of information and the restoration of the organization's image (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 156). Newer research portrays crises as an inevitable and increasingly prevalent part of organizational life (Fink, 1986, pp. 1, 8; Sellnow & Seeger, 2001, p. 153; Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003, p. 3). This is apropos, given the growing reliance on technology and complex organizational systems. In this more holistic view, crises are a natural part of the organizational lifecycle (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 1998; Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 156) and may create the potential for growth and positive outcomes (Penrose, 2000; Seeger & Ulmer, 2002). This shift in conceptualizations adds environmental scanning, risk assessment, and crisis planning to the PR professional's job.

### **Conceptualizing Crises Further**

Recent shifts in the literature notwithstanding, there are several areas of confusion that need to be clarified in order to articulate a rigorous understanding of organizational crises. First, it is important to distinguish between *triggering events* and the *crisis process*. Extant literature argues that crises are brought about by a cosmology episode (i.e., a traumatic event which unhinges one's sense-making ability) (Weick,

1985; Weick 1993) or a trigger event (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003, p. 4). For Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (2003), trigger events “signal radical breaks with previous states of existence” (p. 4). In this view, a crisis is a life-changing, archetypal event for individuals, organizations, and communities (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003, p. 6). Drawing on Shrivastava, Mitroff, Miller, and Miglani (1998), Olaniran and Williams (2001) describe triggering events as “specific events identifiable according to place, time, and agents” (p. 492). Thus, a triggering event (e.g., an oil spill, a failed product, a moral failure) is what sets a crisis in motion. Unfortunately, by delimiting a crisis as an event (see Fearn-Banks, 2001, p. 480; Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 1998, p. 233; Seeger & Ulmer, 2002, p. 126), many traditional definitions obscure the diachronic complexity of crises. Triggering events are part of a crisis, but they must not be confused with the crisis in its entirety.

In an early allusion to the crisis *process*, Fink (1986) describes a crisis as a “fluid, unstable, dynamic *situation* ... things are in a state of constant flux” (p. 20; emphasis added). This is underscored in newer definitions that portray crises as an inevitable, and perhaps necessary, element of the organizational lifecycle (Olaniran & Williams, 2001, p. 487; Seeger & Ulmer, 2002, p. 137). Although still failing to address the contested enactment of crises, these models do move beyond linear conceptualizations of crisis management (such as Littlejohn’s (1983) Six-Step Crisis Model) to emphasize the cyclical nature of crises. One cyclical model reviewed by Fearn-Banks (2001) describes the crisis process as originating with detection (watching for warning signs), then moving through preparation and prevention (heeding warning

signs), containment (limiting the duration/damage), and recovery (efforts to return to normalcy), en route to learning (evaluation of losses/lessons) (p. 480). This last stage serves to turn the crisis into a prodrome, or warning sign, for future crises, thus beginning the cycle again (Fearn-Banks, 2001, p. 480).

Viewing crises as cyclic means they extend beyond one-time events to dynamic situations. This must be taken one step further to highlight their recursivity across time. Rather than an event, a linear process, or a controlled cycle, crises are co-constructed across space and time by a variety of elements. They are comprised of strategic planning and unforeseeable contingencies (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 158), emerge through the interaction of humans and technology (Shrivastava, Mitroff, Miller, & Miglani, 1998, in Penrose, 2000, p. 157), and play out in both internal and external contexts (Coombs, 1995; D'Aveni & MacMillan, 1990; Fink, 1986; Heath, 1990; Penrose, 2000).

Further, although the source organization may attempt to control a crisis situation rhetorically and materially, such attempts do not go uncontested. Alternative accounts may emerge from the media, varying agendas may be offered by stakeholders, critical opinion may come from the public, particular responses may be mandated by legal and law enforcement entities, and confounding information may come to light through organizational members. Unfortunately, traditional approaches fail to take into account the complex body of communication generated in response to a triggering event. What is necessary is a model which illuminates how a source organization and 'its' stakeholders co-construct a crisis through communication that may be alternately conflictual and

collaborative, (dis)allowed, and may (not) effect change. In response to this need, the current study crafts and applies a dialogical model of crisis communication which draws the crisis-focused communication of a variety of stakeholders into a single framework.

Second, it is important to distinguish between *crisis resolution* and *crisis management*. Although the term *crisis management* permeates the literature, it is consistently paired with an emphasis on the quick and efficient *resolution* of crises. The assumption that crises are natural and inevitable has yet to shift researchers' focus from resolution to management; the two are misnamed and conflated throughout the literature. For example, one research team describes the goal of crisis management as moving "beyond the crisis as quickly and thoroughly as possible while maintaining economic viability and social legitimacy" (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 162). Further, Seeger and Ulmer (2002) argue that most strategies in crisis communication typologies "focus largely on moving beyond the crisis, principally by obscuring, disputing, suppressing, diffusing, or discounting responsibility for the event and/or associated harm" (p. 128). Even in phase models, there is an emphasis on prevention, containment, and recovery (see Fearn-Banks, 2001, p. 480). The preoccupation with crisis resolution indicates that the chief intent of organizations in crisis is control and stability. To return to status quo, managers seek to resolve the crisis. Throughout the literature, there is an emphasis on speed and closure, which speak to resolution more than to management, despite the consistent use of the term *crisis management*.

In an early article, Fink (1986) describes crisis management as "managing a fluid situation by a process of vigilant decision making" (p. 11). Although his emphasis on

contingency planning and conditional thinking (p. 55) opens the door for a management focus, Fink functionally equates crisis management with decision-making (p. 133) and thus resolution. He also assumes that crisis managers are involved in the organization's strategic planning process, although this is frequently not the case. In a more recent article, Fearn-Banks (2001) defines crisis management as "strategic planning to prevent and respond during a crisis or negative occurrence, a process that removes some of the risk and uncertainty and allows the organization to be in greater control of its destiny" (p. 480). Here, there is an emphasis on either preventing a triggering event or controlling the crisis situation it may engender, both aspects of resolution.

What is necessary at this point of confusion is to disentangle the concepts of resolution and management. Since most of what is described as crisis management in the literature is driven by the goal of resolution, crisis management has yet to be specified and examined. A clear focus on crisis management would allow researchers to examine how goals of resolution interact with goals of ongoing management. Conceptualizing the goals of crisis PR on a continuum between resolution (emphasizing speed, control, and closure) and management (emphasizing an ongoing, complex, contested process) would be a start. The current study addresses this lack by tracing how a variety of stakeholder organizations use PR to contest the construction of the clergy sex abuse crisis. Rather than focusing on the source organization's attempts to resolve the crisis, this study focuses on how stakeholders alternately seek to extend or close out the crisis.

Third, it is important to take a more complex view of *proactive* versus *reactive* crisis management. Historically PR was construed as the public defense of



organizational actions (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987, p. 167). This defensive orientation has been underscored by the extensive application of apologia in enacting and analyzing crisis management. Since the 1980s, rhetorical analyses of crisis discourse have permeated the literature (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 172). Although researchers argue that rhetoric is not inherently unidirectional (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 173), rhetorical analyses of crisis discourse predominantly focus on apologia, which is, by definition, a discourse of defense (Hearit, 1994).

Set against this backdrop, researchers have begun to explore the implications of proactive crisis management. At the heart of this trend is the previously noted reconceptualization of crises as a phase in the organizational lifecycle. One of the outcomes of this shift is an increasing scholarly attention to crisis planning and proactive crisis strategies (Olaniran & Williams, 2001, p. 488). In this school of thought, situation analyses, decision-making, prevention, and uncertainty-reduction are key (Olaniran & Williams, 2001, pp. 490-492). According to Udwadia and Mitroff (1991), preparation for a crisis requires an awareness of self and one's vulnerability to crisis; it also requires the creation of crisis plan (in Olaniran & Williams, 2001, p. 500). This links back to Fink's early work (1986) in which there is an assumption of conscious, strategic, rational planning.

This emphasis on proactive planning, although an important counter to the reactive/defensive tactics predominant in the early literature, is simplistic. Marra (1998) problematizes the uncritical assumption that crisis plans lead to the 'successful' management of a crisis. Although plans are important, he argues that they must be

augmented by an awareness of how organizational culture, the amount of decision-making autonomy the PR team has, and the PR team's alignment with senior leadership affect the outcome of crisis management. Marra suggests shifting the focus from tactics and techniques to organizational strategies (1998, p. 473).

One such strategy is that of 'stealing thunder.' This is a self-disclosure strategy used in jury trials, politics, and organizational crises in which an individual releases potentially negative information about him or herself before anyone else can (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005, pp. 425-426). Crisis managers who 'steal thunder' may earn increased credibility in the public arena, but run the risk of escalating public attention to their crisis (Arpan & Pompper, 2003, p. 301). Stealing thunder extends the emphasis on proactive crisis communication to preemptive crisis communication, an unnamed possibility in the literature.

Another strategy that indicates the simplistic dualism between reactive and proactive crisis management is that of *kategoria*-based apologia (Hearit, 1996). This counter-attack strategy may take three forms: levying new charges against an attacker, challenging the validity of charges by reframing them; or challenging the ethics of the accuser (Hearit, 1996, pp. 235-236). In effect, this is a rhetorical strategy for turning one stakeholder organization in a crisis from a defensive posture to an offensive posture. This strategy allows a less powerful organization to leverage the force of a more powerful organization's attack against it, much as a smaller wrestler may leverage a larger opponent's weight against him/her. Although, as Hearit indicates, this strategy shifts an organization from the defensive to the offensive (p. 236), it is a responsive

strategy. As such, kategoria-based apologia is a reactive-offensive strategy, something not named in the literature.

Whether crisis communication is proactive, preemptive, or reactively-offensive, the cyclical notion of crises (and the need to address crisis management rather than crisis resolution) makes a clear differentiation between proactivity and reactivity difficult. As Cheney and Christensen (2001) argue, the notion of proactive crisis management predicates research into “how proactivity potentially enacts and precipitates the very situations that organizations seek to escape” (p. 171). It also predicates research into how stakeholders contest the definition of and control over a crisis (p. 171), the focus of this dissertation. What is necessary is a model which allows for a more complex understanding of the ways in which organizations may orient to crisis communication. By taking a dialogical view of crisis communication, it is possible to trace the interactivity in crisis communication. This, in turn, illuminates a variety of discursive mechanisms (which may be more or less intentional and conscious) organizations use in constructing a crisis. (See Table 5 for some possible orientations to crisis communication.) More will be said about this in Chapter VII.

**Table 5**  
**Possible Orientations to Crisis Communication**

<b>Defensive Offensive</b>	<b>Reactive</b> Traditional apologia Kategoria-based apologia	<b>Proactive</b> Stealing thunder Crisis planning
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Thus, although the literature conceptualizes crises in a fairly consistent way, a more rigorous conceptualization must distinguish between triggering events and the communicative construction of a crisis. Further, it must be clear about the competing goals and differing processes of resolution and management. In addition, it is crucial to allow for a more complex understanding of the strategic orientation organizations take to crises. If, contrary to extant conceptualizations, crises are comprised of one or more trigger events embedded in a recursive cycle of planning and management, and if each communicative act in this cycle may take a variety of strategic orientations, it is essential to find a model capable of engaging the communicative complexity of crises. The dialogic model of crisis communication proposed in this dissertation is one mechanism for illuminating the ongoing, complex, interactive nature of organizational crises. The dialogical model constructed in this study offers one way to speak to each of these limitations by foregrounding a variety of ways in which stakeholders communicatively manage an unfolding crisis situation. Foundational to this approach is the concept of crisis communication.

Although some scholars treat crisis communication as one of several crisis management tools (Fink, 1986, in Marcus & Goodman, 1991, p. 284), this exhibits a severely limited conceptualization of communication. A richer understanding emerges when one explores the ways in which communication is constitutive of crises. This is especially important since crisis management is essentially communicative and crises are constructed discursively among stakeholder organizations.

According to Sellnow and Seeger (2001), communication has several roles in crisis literature, and the understanding of communication's role in crises has evolved across time. This section reviews two key orientations to crisis communication and prepares the way for a third. First, in the PR-based literature, crisis communication is treated as a strategic set of practices. Second, in the organizational rhetoric literature, it is treated as the strategic management of meaning. A third potential, developed in this study, addresses a dialogic understanding of crisis communication.

### **Crisis Communication as Strategy**

Generally, public relations scholars present crisis communication as a strategic tool. During crises, effective communication (i.e., the fast delivery of accurate, relevant information) is recommended as an organization's top priority (Penrose, 2000, p. 158). It is described as one of the main elements of crisis plans (Penrose, 2000, p. 157), a mechanism for avoiding crises (Fink, 1986, p. 14), and a way to minimize reputational damage (Fearn-Banks, 2001, p. 480). As such, it is the strategic management of information flow used to protect an organization's image (Coombs, 1995, p. 449; Marra, 1998, p. 462; Penrose, 2000, p. 158).

In this view, communication is described as transmissional, with an emphasis on the dissemination, solicitation, and monitoring of information (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 162). Seeger and Ulmer (2002) concur, describing crisis communication as "practitioner-based strategies for the management of a crisis including crisis planning, decision-making, and media relations" (p. 128).

Key to this strategic, transmissional communication is speed (Arpan & Pompper, 2003, pp. 291-3; Marra, 1998, p. 462; Penrose, 2000, p. 158; Williams & Olaniran, 1994, in Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 162). However, the practitioner mantra of ‘tell it all and tell it fast’ is complicated by issues of risk, timing, and control (Arpan & Pompper, 2003, pp. 291-293). Risk emerges as practitioners manage the tension between stonewalling to mitigate legal ramifications and disclosing to mitigate image ramifications. Timing becomes an issue as media and the source organization grapple over the nature and flow of information. Control is another mitigating issue. When the source organization proactively discloses information, it gains control; however, it risks losing control if this disclosure escalates the import of the crisis (Arpan & Pompper, 2003, pp. 291-293). Quick, full disclosure, then, is not a straightforward process. Be this as it may, good crisis communication is repeatedly described as fast, efficient, and vigilant (Williams & Olaniran, 1994, in Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 162).

Although the research on strategic uses of crisis communication is revealing, its preoccupation with strategic outcomes obscures the sense-making and persuasive functions of crisis communication. Rhetorical analyses, coming as they do out of the rich tradition of communication scholarship, are more illuminating on this point.

### **Crisis Communication as Rhetoric**

Rhetoric, which addresses “the ways in which discourse functions in various social contexts” has been applied to the field of public relations since the early 1980s (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 172). Rhetorical analyses of crises foreground “the processes whereby organizations create and exchange meanings among stakeholders

regarding the risk of crisis, cause, blame, responsibility, precautionary norms, and crisis-induced changes in the organization and its relationship to stakeholders” (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002, p. 128). Crisis rhetoric helps stakeholders make sense of the crisis situation and frame the future (Weick, 1988, in Seeger & Ulmer, 2002, p. 127). It also serves as a means through which an organization can influence and/or control emerging interpretations of the crisis.

Although based on the long tradition of individual rhetoric, scholars argue that corporate rhetoric is unique. Organizational rhetors face greater audience diversity, have access to more creative resources, and may be required to create an image of univocality from polyvocality (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 173; Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 160). Another interesting notion is that management is both the source and audience of its own rhetoric (Heath, 1990, p. 153). When organizational rhetoric becomes internalized as organizational culture, it serves to constrain the perceptions, judgments, and actions of organizational members, management included (Heath, 1990, p. 153). Thus, just as management exerts unobtrusive control over employees through the rhetoric it uses, it may be controlled by the very same rhetoric (p. 153). When organizational rhetoric is oriented toward presentation (precluding discussion or analysis), an organization runs greater risks of crises; when it is oriented toward examination (promoting discussion and analysis), the organization may be better able to mitigate potential crises (Heath, 1990, p. 157). Thus, organizational rhetoric is unique from individual rhetoric in its access to resources, attempts to veil organizational

polyvocality in an image of univocality, and its effect on organizational culture. It is also a key mechanism for the enactment of control and power in and by an organization.

The tradition of organizational rhetoric has been brought to bear on crisis communication from at least four approaches: apologia theory, kategoria-based apologia, image restoration theory, and discourses of renewal. Each of these schools of thought builds on the others. The most developed and closest to the roots of classical rhetoric is that of apologia. Hearit (1994) describes apologia as a ‘discourse of defense’ in which one reframes organizational actions in a more compelling light (pp. 114-115). Although apologia is inherently responsive to some accusation, researchers fail to address the interchange or interactivity among organizational rhetors. Apologia is largely used as an analytical lens for understanding the source organization’s crisis communication.

Hearit (1994) sees apologia as serving three goals for a source organization. First, *persuasive accounts* “reassert terminological control over the interpretation of the act with a counter-interpretation of events” (p. 115). Redefinition through persuasive accounts may deny intent and thus responsibility. Second, *statements of regret* allow organizations to express sorrow while downplaying responsibility. This is important, since admitting concern for victims may negatively affects stock prices and denying responsibility may steady stock prices (p. 117). Third, *dissociation* allows the organization to distance itself from the situation, thus appearing in a more favorable light (p. 121).

Three forms of dissociations are available to organizational rhetors. They may use *opinion/knowledge* dissociations when the facts are debatable; in this case, the



organization argues that the accusations are opinions and offers ‘facts’ to counter them. This functions to deny responsibility or guilt. They may use *individual/group* dissociations when the facts of the case are not in question; in this case, the organization argues that the responsible party is or acted outside of the organization’s realm of authority. This functions to shift blame to another party. Finally, organizational rhetors may use *act/essence* dissociations when the organization must admit some guilt; in this case, the organization argues that the act was wrong, but is not representative of the character of the organization. This functions to deny intent.

Huxman and Bruce (1995) shift the focus from apologia *strategies* to apologia *analyses*. Based on Campbell and Jamieson’s (1978) argument that rhetorical genres share substantive, stylistic, and situational character traits, Huxman and Bruce (1995) propose a ‘dynamic generic framework for apologia’ (p. 57). In order to understand apologia as a genre, one must assess its situational characteristics (accusatory), its substantive characteristics (motivational), and its stylistic characteristics (argumentative). This requires asking three key questions: ‘What exigency caused this situation?’ ‘What is the apologist’s motive?’ and ‘How does the apologist advance the argument?’ (pp. 58-59). Assessing the answers to these questions paves the way for a generic analysis of apologia. However, note that it still fails to address the way in which crisis communication is constructed by a variety of organizations. It is a single-organization analysis.

On the heels of his (1994) terminological approach to apologia, Hearit (1996) proposes the notion of *kategoria*-based apologia (as mentioned earlier). Since apologia is

inherently defensive, Hearit proposes that organizations may respond to an attack with a counter attack. This essentially shifts an accused organization from the defensive (the situation of traditional apologia) to the offensive (p. 236). As already mentioned, there are three forms of *kategoria* (pp. 235-236). First, an organization may levy new charges, although this risks compounding its image of guilt by looking like a dodge. Second, an organization may challenge the validity of charges by reframing them (c.f., opinion/knowledge dissociations). Third, an organization may challenge the ethics of the accuser by labeling the charge as false or labeling the accuser as ethically suspect.

Although Hearit makes an important contribution to the literature by focusing on the shift of power between organizational rhetors, *kategoria*-based apologia is a risky option for practitioners. Given the inherent power differentials among stakeholders in an organizational crisis, an organization can only use this strategy on an opponent of equal or larger power. Otherwise it will appear to be bullying its accuser (p. 244). Additionally, the shift involved in *kategoria* may appear as an attempt to distract stakeholders from key issue(s) (p. 245). This strategy is best used when “the apologists can arguably claim the moral high ground, or at least claim that their opponents have taken the low road” (p. 245). This is an important contribution to the literature, since it requires at least a basic awareness of the communicative interplay among stakeholder organizations.

Benoit’s (1995, 1997) typology of image restoration strategies is the next development in crisis rhetoric. According to Benoit (1997), his focus on message options builds on, and is more exhaustive than, apologia theory (p. 178). Essentially, he offers a

typology of strategies organizations may use to restore their image (p. 178).

Organizations may deny the act with a simple denial or a shifting of blame. They may evade responsibility by claiming that they were provoked, alternative actions were not feasible, the situation was an accident, or they acted out of good intentions.

Organizations in crisis may also work to reduce the offensiveness of the act by bolstering their image, minimizing the act, differentiating the act from more negative acts, pointing to some transcendent aspect of the context or outcome, attacking the accuser, or offering compensation to victims. Finally, they may take corrective action or offer an apology.

Although this approach clearly draws on Hearit's earlier strategies of apologia, it reverts back to a single-rhetor view. Seeger and Ulmer (2002) critique image restoration theory as focusing on "linear rhetorical strategies designed to symbolically position the organization more favorably" (p. 129). Further, it frames the concerns of stakeholders as "obstacles or costs to be quickly resolved, minimized and overcome.... The overriding goal is to return to a pre-crisis state as quickly and with as little damage to the organization's image and reputation, cost and disruption as possible" (p. 129). This critique, emerging directly from the typology of strategies points to a consistent obscuring or devaluing of stakeholders and their concerns in the literature.

Although not speaking to this organizational bias, Seeger and Ulmer's (2002) discourse of renewal is positioned as an alternative to both apologia and image restoration strategies. (Note that this approach, although not strictly rhetorical, situates the 'discourse of renewal' as an alternative to 'discourses of apologia,' connecting it to

the current discussion.) Noting that “crisis-related discourse is most often about harm, responsibility, fault, culpability, blame, guilt, liability, compensation, and victimage” and generally framed as apologia, the authors propose an “optimistic discourse of rebuilding and renewal” (pp. 126-127). They site the expanding research on the positive consequences of crises as a rationale and context for this alternative conceptualization of crisis communication (p. 129). Rather than focusing on strategy, Seeger and Ulmer explore how post-crisis discourse might frame crisis events as “more dynamic, natural, and potentially positive processes in organizing” (p. 129). This focus on discourse moves beyond traditional conceptualizations of rhetoric to focus on the “organic and interactive process of reformation and renewal” central to sense-making and planning (p. 130).

Importantly, this focuses a leader’s discourse on the future through use of ‘prospective sensemaking,’ thus freeing up “organizational resources that may have been constrained by a more myopic, retrospective focus” (p. 137). Although this echoes the standard goal of crisis communication to focus on (an unproblematic) future, it does so by relinquishing issues of blame and causality rather than by resolving them (p. 137). In this approach, crises are viewed as opportunities for transformation and natural components in the organizational lifecycle rather than as interruptions (p. 137). This echoes the shift, noted earlier, to a processual understanding of crises.

In contrast to responses based on apologia or image restoration, renewal responses are provisional rather than strategic (p. 138). That is, leaders using a discourse of renewal draw on their instinctive reaction to a crisis rather than a pre-planned

response (p. 138). One important implication of this research is the specification of how (leaders') discourse can frame the construction (or enactment) of a crisis (Weick, 1979, 1988, 1995; in Seeger & Ulmer, 2002, p. 138). A second key implication is the shift from a generic (i.e., typology-driven) to an organic (i.e., exigency-driven) view of crisis communication (Burns & Bruner, 2000, in Seeger & Ulmer, 2002, p. 139). This unusual shift from standardized to emergent crisis management may privilege crisis management rather than crisis resolution.

As Seeger and Ulmer (2002) note, the crisis communication literature is biased toward generic, strategic approaches to crisis communication. Although PR scholars-practitioners' emphasis on "intention-based, strategy-centered" rhetoric has obscured issues of power, there has been a recent shift in research from linear analyses of particular cases to a "deep appreciation of the interactions of various institutional forces in contemporary (post)industrial society" (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, pp. 172-3). There is some debate in the literature as to the capacity of rhetorical analyses to address this interactivity. While some scholars contend that rhetoric is not "*necessarily* unidirectional, strategic, and unrelated to truth" (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 173), Grunig uses the concept of rhetoric as a foil for his concept of two-way symmetrical PR.

Although Seeger & Ulmer's discourse of renewal is better suited for foregrounding the emergent, organic aspect of crisis communication than traditional rhetorical approaches, it fails to engage any discourse other than the leaders', thus missing polyvocality and interactivity entirely. Amazingly, the entire literature seems to

by-pass the dilemma of a transmission model of communication. As such, it promotes a source-organization bias and obscures the communicative construction of crises.

Thus, the literature reveals that rhetorical (and ‘discourse’) analyses, while augmenting basic assessments of crisis communication *strategies* with a focus on *sense-making* and *enactment*, largely fail to decenter the source organization. This makes them blind to the polyvocality and interactivity of crisis communication. The notion of kategoria-based apologia may stand as the single offering organizational rhetoric scholars make in exploring the interactive nature of crisis communication. What rhetorical (and discourse) analyses add to crisis research is an understanding of how source organizations use communication in a crisis. What they fail to add is an understanding of how communication is used to co-construct a crisis.

To understand how the communication strategies and crisis rhetoric of multiple stakeholder organizations interact, a polyvocal, interactive understanding of crisis communication that decenters the source organization is essential. This study argues that adopting a dialogical perspective on crisis communication offers a way to meet these objectives. To that end, the next chapter reviews the complex literature on dialogue. This paves the way for crafting a dialogic model of crisis communication that will extend extant approaches to dialogue theory in PR.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DIALOGUE**

One of the challenges in understanding dialogue is managing the complexity of the literature, coming as it does from a diversity of disciplines and theoretical orientations. While it is possible to survey the literature by metatheoretical ‘camps,’ it is not the approach taken by this chapter. Following the tradition of many dialogue scholars, this chapter treats dialogue dialogically. That is, it brings “dialogic thinkers into dialogue with one another ... by asking how dialogic theories mutually form and inform one another and the process of communication” (Wood, 2004, p. xv). This chapter, as dialogue itself, is marked by a tensional holism (Stewart, Zediker, & Black, 2004). That is, it focuses on the dialectical tensions within the research on dialogue, highlighting the oppositional forces within that scholarly body. This echoes the essential nature of dialogue, which draws difference into a unified frame. After tracing some essential metatheoretical distinctions among approaches to dialogue, the chapter teases out elements core to a variety of conceptualizations. The understanding that emerges from this chapter extends the conceptualization offered by Kent and Taylor (2002), setting the stage for the dialogic analysis of crisis communication to follow.

The initial research for this chapter led to the generation of a list of key questions, paradoxes, and characteristics that emerge from the literature on dialogue. It also indicated that an understanding of any complexity must address the concept, process, and context of dialogue. A review of the metatheoretical assumptions driving dialogue scholarship paves the way for a discussion of each of these elements.

### **Theorizing Dialogue**

In order to understand what dialogue is (conceptualizations), how it functions (processes), and how it is situated (contextualization), it is essential to identify the theoretical underpinnings of dialogue research. Although Linell (1998) argues that dialogue is undertheorized due to the difficulty of specifying a multi-functional process (p. xvi) and Isaacs (2001) notes the difficulty of articulating any systemic concept of dialogue since such conceptualizations “make claims about something that is in motion where timing, feedback, relationship and context have enormous influence on outcomes and experience” (pp. 715-716), theory plays a central role in the literature on dialogue. Note Isaacs’ (2001) *Action Theory of Dialogue*, Linell’s (1998) treatise on dialogism, the application of coordinated management of meaning to moral conflicts (Littlejohn, 2006), and the substantive works of Buber, Bakhtin, Bohm, Freire, Gadamer, Levinas, and Habermas among others. (See also Cissna and Anderson’s (1998) review of dialogue which cites 117 sources on the topic.)

In order to contextualize the theoretic tensions across the literature, several approaches to categorizing dialogue research are presented. According to Linder (2001), dialogue draws on two historical models: Socratic and Athenian. In the former, dialogue is a mode of inquiry. It emphasizes argumentation between parties, with the goal of discovering truth. This model may be seen to inform Gadamer, Bohm, and Lacan (Linder, 2001). In the Athenian model, dialogue is a mechanism for forming the individual will. It emphasizes generating a common purpose for the sake of collective action. This model may be seen to inform Habermas and Dewey (Linder, 2001).



Linder further groups conceptualizations of dialogue along a continuum (pp. 641-2; in Roberts, 2001). On the normative end of the continuum is the formalist model, typified by Habermas, which focuses on reconstructing everyday language and foregrounds assumptions about the ‘best’ dialogue. In the middle of the continuum is the hermeneutic model, exemplified by Gadamer and Bohm, in which dialogue is used for social inquiry. This draws on Socratic methods to elicit meaning and order. On the empirical end of the continuum is the pragmatic model, best represented by Dewey, which focuses on problem-solving and productive social action. It addresses the emergence of collective intelligence and the production of citizens and communities.

Another categorization system is offered by Stewart and Zediker (2000) and reviewed by Stewart, Zediker, & Black (2004). Stewart and Zediker classify notions of dialogue as either *prescriptive* or *descriptive*. Prescriptive approaches to dialogue (e.g., Buber and Bohm) see all human interactions as relational, but use ‘dialogue’ to refer to a particular quality or type of relating (Stewart, Zediker, & Black, p. 21). Descriptive approaches, on the other hand, use the term *dialogue* to name “the irreducibly social, relational, or interactional character of all human meaning-making” (Stewart, Zediker, & Black, p. 21). In such approaches (e.g., Bakhtin and Gergen), all human life is seen as dialogic. According to Stewart, Zediker, and Black, categorizing approaches as prescriptive or descriptive “prompts reflection about the role of epistemological and ethical considerations in dialogic theory and practice” (p. 22). Here, the authors indicate that typologies, although helpful, fail to illuminate the driving assumptions of any given

approach to dialogue. In fact, it is essential to reflect on the metatheoretical orientation of any approach, regardless of how it may be classified.

Throughout the literature, researchers construct arguments about the ontology, epistemology, and/or axiology of dialogue. According to Stewart (1994), Buber conceptualizes dialogue as constitutive, seeing it as an “ontological nexus between persons” (pp. xiii-xv). In contrast, others argue that *dialogism* is an epistemology which is conceptually distinct from *dialogue* as a type of discourse (Linell, 1998, pp. 8, 10; Marková & Foppa, 1990, pp. 3-4). In this “dialogistic epistemology,” structure and use are intertwined (Linell, 1998, p. 36) and language emerges from contextualized social interaction (Marková & Foppa, 1990, pp. 3-4).

Further, according to Maranhão (1990), although the “result of the dialogical operation may reinforce epistemology... it may also reflect accommodations having little to do with categories of knowledge regarded as true and right” (p. 1). From this perspective, dialogue is the “antipode” of epistemology, or an “antiepistemology” that draws its ontological basis from *logos* (Maranhão, 1990, pp. 1, 10). Tyler (1990) takes this a step further, arguing that Renaissance conceptualizations positioned dialogue as an ethos rather than an ontology or epistemology (p. 298). Similarly, Crowell (1990) argues that the basis for dialogue is ethical rather than ontological or epistemological (p. 356). Returning to their broad categorizations, Stewart, Zediker, and Black (2004), see prescriptive approaches as emphasizing axiology, and descriptive approaches as emphasizing epistemology (p. 22).

To map the lineage of dialogue research, one might establish a link from the Athenian model of dialogue to formalist and pragmatic (i.e., prescriptive) approaches, which emphasize the axiological component of dialogue. Another link might be established between the Socratic model of dialogue and hermeneutic (i.e., prescriptive) approaches, with an emphasis on axiology and, to some extent, ontology. Standing perhaps less connected with the Greek traditions and Linder's continuum are the descriptive approaches, with their emphasis on epistemology. This branch of dialogue scholarship guides the model presented in this study.

Further, by using the work of Linell (among others) to describe the enactment of crisis discourse, this study emphasizes a dialogistic epistemology. For Linell (1998), dialogicality is an epistemological orientation which must not be conflated with a particular type of discourse. In this view, any communication marked by utterances that are "mutually other oriented" has a dialogistic orientation (Linell, 1998, p. 35). In fact, either a monologue or a dialogue may have a dialogistic orientation (Linell, 1998, p. 35). This is essential to the current study, which views press releases through a lens of dialogism. Based on Bakhtin, Linell (1998) argues that dialogicality can be evaluated at three recursive levels: local/utterance, meso/episode, and global/speech event (p. 180). In order to apply a dialogical frame to crisis communication, the analysis that follows maps how discourse functions at multiple interactive levels.

Although researchers tend to emphasize one metatheoretical element over the others, it is important to acknowledge that assumptions about ontology, epistemology, and axiology interplay in any approach to dialogue. In the current study, the primary

focus is on applying a dialogistic epistemology to crisis communication; a secondary focus is on exploring the axiological issues related to the clergy sex abuse crisis. The particular orientation to dialogue that this study adopts will emerge over the course of the next several chapters. For now, it is important to return to a more general review of the concept, process, and context of dialogue.

### **Conceptualizing Dialogue**

To conceptualize dialogue, scholars offer definitions, typologies, and models. They compare and contrast it with what might be termed parallel concepts (e.g., collective inquiry, public communication, conversation, monologism, active listening, social interaction, cooperation). They offer metaphors for dialogue (e.g., a game of instances of understanding, jazz, an information processing system, a container), map out its possible characteristics (e.g., (a)symmetrical, egalitarian, mutual, harmonious, open, consensual, other-oriented, unstructured, transformative, (de)generative) and highlight paradoxes in its enactment (e.g., cooperation vs. competition; individuality vs. collectivity; coherence vs. fragmentation). They also discuss ways to evaluate it (e.g., contextualized efficacy, discursive efficacy; evaluation at interactive level). Although it is informative to review extant conceptualizations of dialogue, it almost does more to muddy one's understanding than to clarify it. One way to engage this conceptual breadth is to engage a cross section of definitions holistically. Table 6 (next page) lists a selection of definitions of dialogue.

**Table 6**  
**Selected Definitions of Dialogue**

- 
- a “fundamental process-quality of understanding and immediacy” (Anderson, Cissna, & Arnett, 1994)
  - a “mutuality of discourse” (Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett, 2001)
  - “discursive coordination in the service of social ends,” “the process of relational coordination” (Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004)
  - “communication between simultaneous differences” (Clark and Holquist, 1984, in Hazen, 1993)
  - “a discipline of collective thinking and inquiry, a process for transforming the quality of conversation and, in particular, the thinking that lies beneath it” (Isaacs, 1993)
  - “a sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions, and certainties that compose everyday experience” (Isaacs, 1993)
  - “reflective learning process” (Isaacs, 1993)
  - a phenomenological orientation “that stresses the constitution of a shared world, a shared understanding, a coming together” (Crapanzano, 1990)
  - “a speech across, between, through two people. It is a passing through and a going apart” (Crapanzano, 1990)
  - both logos and “concrete, embodied intersubjectivity” (Luckmann, 1990)
  - “sign-bound face-to-face communication which involves that high degree of immediacy and reciprocity which occurs when the streams of consciousness of the participants in social communication are fully synchronized” (Luckmann, 1990)
  - a “togetherness of talking,” a “mutuality of exchanging ideas” (Graumann, 1990)
  - “sustained collective deliberations that create a ‘field’ for inquiry: a setting where people can become more aware of the context around their experience, and of the processes of thought and feeling that created that experience” (Isaacs; in Roberts, 2001)
  - “public talk about common concerns” (Linder; in Roberts, 2001)
  - an alternative to hierarchical decision-making (Sawyer, 2003)
- 

Although the definitions emerge from contrasting theoretical perspectives (i.e., dialogue as particular type of discourse versus dialogue as a generic quality of discourse), it is possible to map a broad conceptualization of dialogue. Across perspectives, dialogue is conceptualized as interactive and relational. Although it is collaborative and to some degree coordinated, it is not necessarily cooperative or symmetrical. It generally serves the goals of inquiry and understanding. It creates the possibility for transformation or second-order change. It is a symbol-based mechanism for meaning-making. It is created in the tension between individuality and collectivity,

and is characterized by immediacy to a given context. Each of these elements is key to the conceptualization of dialogue presented at the end of this chapter.

### **The Process of Dialogue**

Another area in which it is important to trace tensions and overlap across the literature is the process (or functions) of dialogue. Among issues such as dialogue's outcome or utility (e.g., meaning-making; personal, situational, or organizational change; transcendence; productivity; synchrony; community-building; group action), its goals (e.g., cooperation or competition), and the agents involved (e.g., the public; a facilitator; primary/secondary participants, actual/virtual participants, present/remote addressee, reader/listener, self/other), three elements stand out: prerequisites to dialogue, impediments to dialogue, and the 'process components' of dialogue. Each is addressed in turn.

#### **Prerequisites**

Researchers working from hermeneutic and/or prescriptive notions of dialogue argue that participants must exhibit a capacity for self-transcendence (Grudin, 1996, p. 112) and metacommunication (Mecke, 1990, p. 198); they must also possess a willingness to release their assumptions (Swearingen, 1990, p. 52). More generally, dialogue requires an atmosphere of trust (Anderson, Cissna, & Arnett, 1994, p. 4) and vulnerability (Cissna & Anderson, 1994, p. 10). Dialogue participants need to be connected (Cissna & Anderson, 1994, p. 10) and cooriented (Stewart, 1994, p. xvi). They also need a 'common center,' or a text available to all participants (Arnett, 1994, p. 231).

According to Maranhão (1990), there should be a “symmetry of participation and goodwill” among participants (p. 8). Note that the former is an equality of involvement, not of power, and that the latter is more about the willingness to listen than about charity. Dialogue requires that those in positions of authority shift from leaders to facilitators (Helling & Thomas, 2001, pp. 764-765). All participants must relinquish ‘anarchic autonomy’ (Crowell, 1990, p. 19) and respect one another as autonomous subjects rather than objects (Rahim, 1994, p. 131).

From these relatively traditional interventionist perspectives then, dialogue is predicated on individuals who possess a capacity for self-transcendence and metacommunication, who share a common “text,” who are mutually, although not necessarily equally, involved in the process, and who are willing to relinquish preexisting roles and total autonomy. Although the current study presents a dialogical analysis of public relations texts rather than a review of highly structured face-to-face dialogue, the prerequisites for participants is still important to acknowledge. In this study, they inform the concluding assessment of the crisis as a speech event which is co-constructed by key stakeholders in the case.

Having introduced some prerequisites of dialogue, it is important to discuss what might stymie it.

### **Impediments**

Across the literature, two types of impediments to dialogue emerge: discursive impediments and social-psychological impediments. Discursive impediments to dialogue include attempts at persuasion, explanation, deep-structural translation (Crowell, 1990,

p. 345), advocacy, information control, spin, and compromise (Spano, 2001, p. 29). It is also hindered by confrontational, adversarial, and war-like orientations (Spano, 2001, p. 30). Dialogue may be hindered by competing goals (Helling & Thomas, 2001, p. 758), a lack of acknowledgement, and mutual face saving (Schein, 1993).

Although a common textual center is important, a shared language may hamper dialogue by priming participants to overlook subcultural differences (Schein, 1993, p. 49). Time pressures may also undermine the requisite relationship-building and lead to defensiveness (Schein, 1993). This, in turn, may preclude the development of trust. Negation, an utterance (or absence thereof) which “essentially destroys the meaning-making potential of a preceding utterance” and individual blame are two other communicative impediments to dialogue (Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004, p. 50). Although these discursive impediments are difficult to synthesize, it is clear that dialogue can be obstructed by specific communication tactics (e.g., negation and blame) and by general communication orientations (e.g., defensiveness and an emphasis on time constraints). Such impediments are salient to both prescriptive and descriptive notions of dialogue.

Social-psychological impediments to dialogue stem from cultural and philosophical phenomena. According to Dewey’s pragmatic notion of dialogue, technology and corporate life derail dialogue by severing the processes of speaking and listening across time and space, increasing one-way communication, increasing the passivity of individuals, and reducing individual agency (Evans, 2001, pp. 644-645). Where humans are socialized to think categorically and withhold information that would



challenge the social order, dialogue may be hampered (Schein, 1993, p. 41). For these authors, any social phenomena disconnecting people and/or reducing mutuality hampers dialogue. In the clergy sex abuse crisis, categorical thinking and a reticence to challenge the social order are greater barriers to dialogue than is technology. In fact, technology is used by key stakeholders to overcome communicative barriers erected by the hierarchy.

According to Roberts (2001), Linder attributes a modern skepticism about dialogue to preferences for specialized expertise, hierarchical direction, and to substantive talk (pp. 641-642). Although the conflict between substantive talk and dialogue may seem counter-intuitive, it is based on conflation of dialogue with sensitivity training (Schein, 1993, p. 40) and bargaining (Linder, 2001, p. 661, cited in Roberts, 2001, p. 641-642). When people define dialogue as a managerial fad or as a mechanism for agenda-setting or self-promotion, it is unlikely to be valued or implemented. This is compounded when dialogue is discussed as a transformative mechanism of communication, but experienced as a stylized practice. The dissonance between appearance and experience may lead to a general reticence to implement dialogue (Linder, 2001, p. 660, cited in Roberts, 2001, pp. 641-642). This clearly emerges in the present case, in which participants criticize politicized uses of the term *dialogue* and its correlates.

According to Linder (2001), the modern philosophical assertion of a 'pre-social individual' (i.e., the belief that individuals create society rather than the reverse) has led to a monologic, private rationality (p. 656-657, cited in Roberts, 2001, pp. 641-642). This shift to a monologic rationality has been compounded by social and economic shifts

that sever individuals from the communities and common cultures that contextualized dialogue. In an era of differentiation, fragmentation, specialization, and pluralism, public communication becomes indirect and impersonalized (Linder, 2001, pp. 657-659, cited in Roberts, 2001, pp. 641-642). Although Linder views fragmentation as a roadblock to dialogue, this study shows how a dialogic epistemology can be applied to what might be considered fragmented crisis discourse.

Although the discursive limitations on dialogue are better illuminated by a micro-level analysis and the social-psychological limitations on dialogue by a macro-level analysis, it is essential to remember that dialogue unfolds at multiple, recursive levels. Thus, discursive limitations and social-psychological limitations may be recursive.

### **Process Components**

The micro-macro distinction is especially evident as researchers address the processes of dialogue. On one hand are researchers who use discourse analyses to describe dialogue on a micro level; on the other hand are researchers who draw on notions of civic participation to prescribe public dialogues. In the following paragraphs, Linell's (1998) description of the discursive moves of dialogue is used to illuminate micro-level analyses of dialogue. The work of Spano (2001), Isaacs (1993), and a variety of dialogue practitioners are used to introduce some processes prescribed for large-scale public dialogues. Literature from both arenas is briefly reviewed below.

Linell (1998) offers a detailed model for describing the linguistic and communicative patterns in dialogue. In Linell's (1998) view, dialogue is governed by four principles: sequentiality, joint construction, act-activity interdependence (i.e., the

meaning of an utterance being derived from its embeddedness in a specific activity), and superordinance (i.e., the reflexivity between discourse and context) (Linell, 1998, p. 87).

More particularly, an analysis of dialogue should compare:

- Initiatives to responses
- Soliciting/obliging (i.e., demand direct response) to non-soliciting/non-obliging initiatives (i.e., invite continuation)
- Verbal to silent/nonverbal responses
- Local (i.e., tied to immediately preceding remark) to non-local responses
- Focal (i.e., tied to main content) to non-focal responses
- Tied (i.e., in line with preceding context) to untied utterances
- Self-tied (i.e., tied to own contribution) to other-tied responses (Linell, 1998, pp. 169-71)

The model used for this dissertation highlights two of Linell's principles: joint construction and superordinance. It foregrounds how the discourse of three key stakeholder organizations co-constructs the crisis (joint construction), and the role of context in constructing the clergy sex abuse crisis (superordinance). It also adapts Linell's focus on initiatives/responses, (non)soliciting/(non)obliging, and (non)focal responses.

Further, utterances function on three levels: content/meaning, relationship/power alignment, and interaction/process (Linell, 1998, p. 177). These levels yield possible levels for dialogic analysis. Other possible units for analysis include the topic and the episode. According to Linell, topicality is "the property of 'aboutness' in discourse" (p.

181), and topics are sustained matters (p. 182). Topics are created by junctures in interactional flow, and participants create intersubjectivity through topical coherence (Linell, 1998, pp. 181-182). An episode is “a bounded sequence, a discourse event with a beginning and an end surrounding a spate of talk, which is usually focused on the treatment of some ‘problem,’ ‘issue’ or ‘topic’” (Linell, 1998, p. 183). Episodes may be either homogeneous/monotopical or heterogenous/polythematic. Heterogenous episodes may be ‘messy’ (i.e., having multiple topics open simultaneously) or ‘clean’, using ‘topic glides’ to transition sequence of topics (Linell, 1998, p. 189).

Going beyond intradialogic components, Linell addresses the interactive components of dialogue. To assess non-local aspects of dialogue, Linell focuses on the following elements of social-interaction: mutual attention (i.e., attention to one another’s actions, beliefs), common focus (i.e., the establishment of a common point of discussion), and contribution ties (i.e., mechanisms which carry topics over sequences of interaction) (p. 179). Here, the focus is on how participants interactively manage the discourse of a dialogue. These are of particular interest to the case at hand.

Linell frankly admits a bias toward dialogic coherence. To address dialogue as a struggle to achieve intersubjectivity or discursive power, he recommends emphasizing the multi-functionality of utterances and contributions; polyvocality; discrepant relevances and competing communicative projects; dominance and power; asymmetries of knowledge and participation; and complementarity of dialogue roles (1998, p. 89). This shift is important for the current study, given its focus on how three organizations co-construct the clergy sex abuse crisis. Although not an analysis of face-to-face

interaction, this study adapts Linell's discourse-analytic approach to explore the interactive nuances of public relations communication. The model in this study replaces Linell's focus on utterances with one on press releases/statements and explores (among other things) how topics are negotiated across time in PR discourse.

In contrast to this micro-analytic perspective, other researchers address dialogue as a macro-social phenomenon (Isaacs, 1993; Murphy, 1995; Spano, 2001). Spano (2001) sees public dialogue as emphasizing exploration, deliberation, discussion, and collaboration (p. 29). It involves an equal emphasis on listening and speaking, the open expression and consideration of viewpoints, the prioritization of coordination over competition, staying in tension between holding one's ground and being open to another's, communicating trust, and marking understanding (p. 30). Spano goes on to list a variety of communication skills necessary for engaging a public dialogue, including taking a neutral, not-knowing position; dialogic listening; eliciting experiences and stories; appreciative inquiry; systemic questioning; and reflecting (pp. 38-43).

Isaacs (1993) offers another set of guidelines for public dialogue. According to this author, participants must suspend assumptions, observe, listen, slow down the process of inquiry, be aware of thought, and 'befriend' polarization (p. 33). In her (1995) work on workplace dialogues, Murphy offers a series of recommendations for stimulating dialogical understanding. From her perspective, such dialogues must offer participants opportunities to: disclose personal feelings about relevant issues, dialogue within and across relevant groups, identify and speak to driving assumptions about self and other, learn about one another in a non-threatening way, make requests of one

another (pp. 81-84). Note that Spano and Isaacs emphasize the receptive, reflective, neutral orientation required of participants, while Murphy emphasizes a more expressive, investigative orientation. The goal of public dialogue is an increased mutual understanding. In some instances, it is used as a preliminary step for decision-making and action-focused discussions. In other instances, it is a tool for conflict management or dispute resolution.

Any review of dialogue at the macro-social level must include the grounded work coming from seminal projects such as the National Issues Forums, the Public Conversations Project, and the Public Dialogue Consortium (Pearce and Littlejohn, 1997). Additional (types of) dialogical projects include A Search for Common Ground, The Listening Project, study circles, policy juries, and some types of encounter groups (Dukes, 1996, pp. 71-75). Each of these projects derives its essence from the Socratic traditions of inquiry and draw on hermeneutic models of dialogue, since they promote meaning-making through social inquiry. They are clearly prescriptive approaches to dialogue.

On the general level, Dukes (1996) describes the dialogical sensibility guiding each of these approaches to public discourse as an exploratory process that seeks to educate stakeholders, illuminate stakes, raise awareness of an issue, highlight points of discussion, deter violent confrontation, and cultivate support for impending decisions (pp. 63-64). Dialogic principles may be present at any single stage of a public conflict, or it may undergird the entire process, as it would in policy dialogue (Dukes, 1996, p. 54).

Pearce and Littlejohn's (1997) review of three programs reveals more particularly how such large scale dialogues function. The National Issues Forum (NIF) annually sponsors civic deliberations on current socio-political issues. This forum focuses equally on speaking and listening, with a goal of understanding. This is based on the assumption that "*Actors make choices by deliberative dialogue to come to public judgment and thereby establish a public voice through common ground and complementary action*" (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 173). The process unfolds in issue-based community forums or study circles. Participants have the opportunity to do some pre-reading on the selected issue and a set of prescribed choices that may stem from it. During the event, participants go from sharing perspectives on the issue to considering each possible choice in turn. Next, participants address the deep commonalities or differences undergirding each choice. The outcome is a deeper consideration of the assumptions at work in the issue and perhaps some recommendations for helping policymakers frame their treatment of the issue (pp. 175-176). According to Pearce and Littlejohn, the public judgment that emerges from these deliberations "is an outcome in which people continue to hold different views but with a fuller, more complete understanding of the powers and limits of each view" (p. 173).

In the Public Conversations Project (PCP), opponents are positioned as uncontentious listeners; destructive differences and blame are disallowed; and narrative revelation and self-reflexivity are emphasized (Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004, pp. 53-54). Key to PCP sessions is a focus on the complexity of what are traditionally viewed as polarized issues. Facilitators serve four goals: preparing participants to enter a new type

of experience, creating a safe context, discouraging standard patterns of interaction, and stimulating the co-construction of a new interaction (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 182). PCP facilitators conceptualize dialogue as an interaction that combines spontaneous sharing and listening and foregrounds ambiguities rather than certainties (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 183). Here, questions are motivated by an authentic desire to understand the Other.

The Public Dialogue Consortium (PDC) emerged from the Kaleidoscope Project and draws on the work of the NIF and PCP among others and takes a systems approach to communication. The goal of this type of public discourse is to stimulate ‘transcendent communication’ in situations of moral conflict (Littlejohn, 2006). Transcendent communication ‘creates new frames that transcend differences...transforms relationships... [and] creates opportunities to explore the powers and limits of multiple worldviews’ (Littlejohn, 2006, pp. 407-408). To achieve the goal of transcendent communication, PDC projects work from four assumptions: communication is a patterned social construct, every communication pattern has its own guiding ‘grammar,’ communication recursively constructs its context, and social realities are enacted (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, pp. 199-200). Practitioners use *systemic questioning* to elicit and stimulate critique participants’ ‘grammar.’ They also use *appreciative inquiry* to shift the group from a negative to positive direction. Another tool is *reflecting*, a “type of shared hypothesizing in which an interviewer reflects possible connections, contexts, and futures based on answers to systemic and appreciative questions” (p. 203). The process



that emerges is a highly structured attempt to redefine a moral conflict (Littlejohn, 2006, p. 408).

The prescriptive, interventionist orientations to public dialogue represented by these researcher-practitioners are no less salient to specifying the process components of dialogue than are descriptive, language-based orientations. Unfortunately, there is an artificial (or perhaps practical) fault line between the two orientations. The difficulty is bringing the rich analytical potential of discourse analysis to bear on an emergent large-scale social situation. Although risky, this dissertation draws from the substantive micro-analytic traditions of discourse analysis to explore how multiple organizations discursively construct of a large-scale crisis. More will be said about this later.

### **Contextualizing Dialogue**

A survey of the literature reveals a shared focus on the concept and process of dialogue. It also reveals a focus on the context of dialogue. The centrality of context is clear in Linell's (1998) argument that dialogism is contextualized (inter)actions (p. 7). Both prescriptive and descriptive researchers address two levels of context: external and internal. Externally, dialogue is situated within a specific socio-historical context. Internally, dialogue creates a container (or context) within which a particular type of interaction occurs (Isaacs, 2001; Swearingen, 1990). Linell (1998) notes a tension between the co-construction of a dialogue (i.e., its internal context) and the socio-historical dimension (i.e., its external context). Thus, one might say that dialogue *has* and *is* a context, and that those two levels of context are held in tension. Others address

the temporal, spatial, ideological, and discursive contexts of a dialogue, as the following paragraphs show.

According to Swearingen (1990), dialogues are atemporal internally. They serve to slow down or even stop time (Isaacs, 2001). Externally, however, they emerge from the historical past and affect the emergent future. There may be a tension between the permanence of textual dialogues and the fleeting nature of oral dialogues. Attention to time is required to mark the interactivity, coherence, sense-making, and intersubjectivity of a dialogue. The notion that dialogues suspend time, resist closure, and extend the present stands in direct contrast to crisis communication's typical goal of closure. In order to manage the tension between dialogic and PR notions of time, the model used in this study traces the discursive presence of stakeholders across time. This is an essential step to understanding the temporal context of a crisis.

Traditional models of dialogue presume that dialogues occur within a particular spatial context. This may refer to both the local physical setting of the dialogue and the global abstract conditions surrounding its emergence (Linell, 1998). Unfortunately, the literature does not offer a substantive treatment of the spatial context of a dialogue. This may in part be due to the prescriptive notion that dialogues are face-to-face interchanges. By exploring the dialogical aspects of crisis communication posted on the internet (the data for this study), the current study challenges extant notions of spatial context. Further study is needed to explore the implications of an asynchronous context on a dialogue.

Every dialogue is also embedded within an ideological context or framework. Linell (1998) argues that each utterance in a dialogue is "framed by *expectations*,

*entitlements and obligations* with respect to possible meaning attributions and actions” (p. 83). That is, the meanings generated through a dialogue are dependent on the ideologies within which they are framed. In the current study, the ideological context influences how participants treat the notion of dialogue itself (i.e., politicized uses of *dialogue* and its correlates). It also emerges in how participants frame the institution of the Roman Catholic Church and participation therein (i.e., a democratic right or dangerous dissent).

Additionally, dialogues are situated within particular discursive contexts. The discursive context refers to salient communication genres. It also refers to the coherence of a dialogue, in which each utterance is linked to the utterances surrounding it (Linell, 1998). This study operates within the generic context of public relations discourse. It explores ‘coherence’ within this genre by tracing the (non)responsiveness of stakeholders to one another’s discourse.

Context can function to either focus or expand a dialogue, as this study will show. When it serves as a source of referents, constrains sense-making, or directs attention, context bounds an emerging dialogue (or the dialogicality of disparate texts). When it is contested, demarcates change, spans time, and/or connects internal and external audiences, context serves a broadening function. In the current case, it appears that dissent and advocacy organizations use context to broaden the crisis, while the source organization uses it to constrain the crisis.

A holistic reading of the literature, then, shows that dialogues have multiple emergent, contested contexts. Context serves as both the subject and object of dialogue

and as both precedent and antecedent to dialogue. Since context both constrains and enables dialogue, it may be described as recursive with dialogue. To a large degree, the current study focuses on the internal context of the crisis. In particular, it traces the temporal, ideological, and discursive contexts of the crisis as constructed by the stakeholder organizations. Attention to the spatial context is left for another study.

### **Specifying Dialogue for This Study**

As noted, the research on dialogue is amorphous, which makes a review of the literature unwieldy. In addressing the theoretical underpinnings of dialogue, the concept of dialogue, the process of dialogue, and the site or context of dialogue, the goal of this chapter has been to mark the outlines of a tensional-holistic understanding of dialogue. This breadth sets the stage for articulating a more particular conceptualization of dialogue, a prerequisite for constructing a dialogic model of crisis communication.

Overall, researchers agree that dialogue is both praxis and theory, a type of discourse and an ideal, form and content. It requires some amount of coordination since it balances individuality and collectivity (Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004; Maranhão, 1990). Schein (1993) describes dialogue as a group process that requires individual willingness to participate. An extant tension among participants is prerequisite to dialogue (Clark and Holquist, 1984, in Hazen, 1993; Crapanzano, 1990). This leads to the assumption that dialogue is a mechanism to map or gain perspective on fragmentation (Isaacs, 1993, p. 30; Nichol, p. vii, in Bohm, 1996).

Dialogue is agreed to be a generative (Crapanzano, 1990; Linder, 2001), symbolic (Linell, 1998; Luckmann, 1990; Marková, 1990) mechanism used to create

meaning (Medvedev and Bakhtin, 1978, in Hazen, 1993; Roberts, 2001), understanding (Anderson, Cissna, & Arnett, 1994; Crapanzano, 1990), and transformation (Crapanzano, 1990; Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004; Grudin, 1996; Isaacs, 2001) through inquiry (Evans, in Roberts, 2001; Isaacs, 2001; Linder, 2001).

In their comparative assessment of five key dialogue philosophers (i.e., Buber, Bakhtin, Bohm, Freire, and Gadamer), Stewart, Zediker, and Black (2004) argue for two common approaches to dialogue: holism and tensionality. Holism, in this context, is the tendency to frame a topic as a totality. Although ‘holism’ may be summative or synergistic, Stewart, Zediker, and Black argue that the five key writers on dialogue use a tensional holism. By tensionality they allude to the “sense that the whole...is centrally marked by both a complementary and contradictory quality that renders it inherently fluid and dynamic” (p. 27). This defines dialogue ‘dynamically and dialectically rather than as a static construct’ (p. 23). The emphasis on the dialectical tensions within a coherent (social, textual, etc.) body may be compared to Plato’s *metaxy* (the “between”), Montgomery and Baxter’s (1998) *both/andness* (in which multiple views interplay without losing their essence), and Clark and Holquist’s (1984) “communication between simultaneous differences” (Stewart, Zediker, & Black, 2004, pp. 27-8, 37).

Despite agreement on these elements, researchers disagree on other essentials. Some, like Gadamer, argue that symmetry is essential (Crowell, 1990); others argue that it is neither inherently cooperative nor symmetrical (Linell, 1998). They disagree on the locality of dialogue, some arguing that it is nonlocalized (Bradley, 2001), others arguing that it requires physical co-presence (Linell, 1998). There is a tension between normative

and descriptive definitions, and between historic traditions and modern conceptualizations.

Based on the extant literature, amorphous and diverse as it is, this study conceptualizes dialogue as *a sustained, symbol-based, contextualized, collaborative-agonistic process of interactive social inquiry which creates meaning and a potential for change*. Since each aspect of this definition is intentional and meaningful, it is important to unpack the definition briefly. As an essentially communicative process, dialogue is enacted through the use of symbols and serves a meaning-making function. It is used to make inquiry into some (social) phenomena, and this inquiry is engaged on a collective (i.e., dyadic, group, organizational, or cultural) level. Etymologically, *dialogue* indicates “a speech across, between, through ... people” (Crapanzano, 1990). Although essentially interactive, dialogue does not require symmetry or cooperation (Linell, 1998, p. 13). This interaction unfolds in what might be described as a tense collaboration (Clark & Holquist, 1984, in Hazen, 1993; Crapanzano, 1990; Linell, 1998, pp. 13, 214). Much like a rubber band, dialogue uses opposing forces to draw things together.

To understand dialogue, one must acknowledge the context within which it unfolds. More than a location in time and space, the context of a dialogue is a nexus of ideological assumptions and particular socio-cultural exigencies. This context emerges from extant patterns of thought and affects how the dialogue is framed. A key element of dialogue that is underrepresented in the literature is its protracted nature. As a dynamic social process, dialogue is not the work of an instant. Rather, it unfolds across time, and is thus described as a sustained inquiry (Isaacs, 2001). One of the key outcomes of

dialogue is the potential for change, be that generative, degenerative, or transformational (Crapanzano, 1990; Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004; Grudin, 1996; Hazen, 1993; Isaacs, 2001; Linder, 2001). Although dialogue does not lead to inevitable change, it inevitably challenges stasis. This is indicated in Swearington's (1990) description of dialogue as a liminal mode of discourse (p. 64). Again, dialogue is *a sustained, symbol-based, contextualized, collaborative-agonistic process of interactive social inquiry which creates meaning and a potential for change.*

## CHAPTER V

### METHODOLOGY

In 1989, Pearson offered what is considered the first rigorous application of dialogue to PR. Although his premature death cut short the development of his research on a dialogical ethic for PR, his work opened an important area of research for the field. In fact, dialogical principals thread through the discipline's reigning paradigm (i.e., Grunig's symmetrical model), although with an imprecise conceptualization and problematic application. Further, dialogue has been named as a possible new paradigm for the field (Beton & Taylor, 2004, p. 659; Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 33). Despite its seeming prominence in the literature, its potential has yet to be engaged fully by scholars. In a 1992 article, Kent and Taylor made a preliminary exploration of the essence of dialogue and ways in it may be salient to PR practice. They concluded that more work is necessary on the theoretical issues of such a perspective (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 33). One way to continue developing a dialogic theory of PR (and thus theorizing PR) is to craft a dialogic model for PR discourse. The current study uses grounded practical theory (GPT) to craft a dialogical model for the analysis of PR discourse and applies it to press releases produced in the clergy sex abuse crisis.

The GPT approach to research originated with Craig in 1983, and adapts the basic elements of Glaser & Strauss's (1967) grounded theory in order to build practical theory (Barge & Craig, in press). According to Barge and Craig, practical theory seeks to address practical problems and generate new possibilities for action. Drawing on Glaser and Strauss's *constant comparison*, GPT generates "an evolving normative model or



‘rational reconstruction’ that conceptualizes values and principles (or ‘situated ideals’) already partly implicit in practice” (Barge & Craig, in press).

By sifting actual press releases together in light of a particular dialogical epistemology, this study maps a new model for understanding crisis communication. Mapping uses theory to chart the “communicative territory of people’s experience and identify the important landmarks and pathways that distinguish that landscape” (Barge & Craig, in press). More particularly, this study uses ‘an interpretive approach to mapping’ to identify the communicative strategies stakeholder organizations use to manage the clergy sex abuse crisis and the consequences of using those strategies (Barge & Craig, in press). Teasing out (the consequences of) each stakeholder’s strategies in light of the crisis as a chaotically bounded situation offers the potential to inform and/or challenge future crisis communication practices.

Since the research process and analysis are recursively constructed in grounded practical theory research, recounting how the research process emerged is essential to understanding the analysis. What follows is a description of how the stakeholder organizations and data were selected.

### **Selecting the Stakeholder Organizations**

In order to decenter the source organization and foreground the polyvocal co-construction of the clergy abuse crisis, it is essential to account for the crisis communication generated by a variety of stakeholder organizations. Before addressing the three key stakeholder organizations selected for this study, a brief review of the stakeholder concept is in order.

## The Stakeholder Concept

While PR literature refers interchangeably to publics, audiences, and stakeholders, this study uses *stakeholder organization* in response to Cheney and Christensen's (2001) use of the term (p. 176). This term is selected based on the assumption that an organization's primary interactions are with other organizations rather than with individuals (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 176). This may build on the assumption that public discourse is generally inter-organizational, with organizational-individual discourse tending to be privatized. Further, as Leitch and Neilson (2001) note, PR theories generally name organizations as potential publics (p. 130). Additionally, given the goal of addressing the overlap between organizational communication and PR, this is an important terminological choice. In order to identify what organizations are salient to a crisis, one must understand what constitutes a stakeholder.

Although not a PR researcher, Clarkson (1995) argues that stakeholders are entities that “bear risk as a result of a firm's activities” (in Vidaver-Cohen, 1999, p. 39). They may *affect* the organization or *be affected by* the organization, and they may be *voluntary* (able to remove themselves from risk) or *involuntary* (unable to remove themselves from risk) stakeholders (Vidaver-Cohen, 1999, p. 40). Stakeholders co-construct conflicts/crises through their communication. For example, they may deny, downplay, and exclude one another through denials of outcome severity, of stakeholder inclusion, or of self-involvement, all of which culminate in an exclusion of some type (Opotow & Weiss, 2000, pp. 479, 481). The recognition that stakeholders have some

ability to affect a crisis (and one another) is central to the goals of tracing the interactive polyvocality of the clergy sex abuse crisis.

Writing from a PR perspective, Fearn-Banks (2001) agrees with this view of stakeholders, although focusing on individuals rather than organizations. She describes stakeholders as “people who have an interest in the organization and are affected by decisions made by it” (p. 482). That Watson (1991) defines stakeholders as *claimants* points to an interdependence between organizations and their stakeholders that is central to inter-organizational crisis management (in Daugherty, 2001, p. 395). Defining stakeholders as those able to affect or to be affected (by the organization or by other stakeholders) or by relationship (with the organization or with other stakeholders) foregrounds the interactive, contested nature of crisis communication, and decenters the source organization – again central to this study.

According to Estes (1996), stakeholders include “employees, customers, stockholders, suppliers, lenders, neighboring communities, and society at large” (p. 29, in Stark & Kruckeberg, 2001, p. 56). Similar lists are given by Daugherty (2001) and Heath (1988). PR standards expect an organization to know, rank, and cultivate relationships with its stakeholders (Fearn-Banks, 2001, p. 482). According to stakeholder theory, organizational success depends on the ability to manage the conflicting demands of stakeholders (Coombs, 2001, pp. 111-112). Key here is stakeholder segmentation. This is especially important given the “many complex, and sometimes conflicting, roles played by the growing number of stakeholders in today’s society” (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 171). Although these perspectives fail to

challenge the organization-centered view of PR, they do indicate the broad array of stakeholders which may require an organization's attention.

Emerging from a more relational (although still organization-centered) orientation comes research on stakeholder ethics, management, and interests. In one view, stakeholder ethics "emphasizes an organization's obligations to both internal and external publics, with the realization that these interests often will conflict" (Curtin & Boynton, 2001, p. 417). More particularly, management may orient to stakeholders in four ways: immoral (i.e., management exploits stakeholders), ethical misconduct (i.e., management misleads, cheats, or disregards stakeholders), amoral (i.e., managers focus on profit making, downplay morality), and moral (i.e., management views itself as interdependent and equal with stakeholders) (Daugherty, 2001, pp. 396-7; see also Carroll, 1991). The arguable premise of many dialogue researchers is that dialogic communication is inherently ethical.

Although Makower (1994) argues that organizations operate best when they align their interests with those of stakeholders (in Daugherty, 2001, p. 390), Leitch and Neilson (2001) point out that organizations may find no advantage in aligning themselves with publics (p. 129). Unfortunately, much of the research on managing stakeholder relationships (ethically) fails to address the complex interdependence among organizations and stakeholders. One reason may be that research tends to privilege managerial interests, thus ignoring all but the most powerful stakeholder organizations. This bias also obscures interaction among stakeholder organizations.

Narrowing the focus to crisis communication, Mitroff and Pearson (1993) recommend that organizations advance their relationships with intervening stakeholder groups and stimulate collaboration among stakeholders (p. 114; in Fearn-Banks, 2001, p. 481). Note the agency/power attributed to the organization here. Despite the expectation that organizations communicate forthrightly with a heterogeneous group of stakeholders in a crisis situation (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 162), crisis communication is necessarily constrained by the potential of litigation. Acknowledging stakeholder action, Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (2001) say that stakeholders stake “freedom of information-based right to know” claims about the potential risks of a plethora of organizational phenomena (p. 157). Further, stakeholders face both legitimate risks and media-, rumor-, or ignorance-induced concerns (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 157). Although this opens the door to understanding crisis situations from the perspective of stakeholders, it barely scratches the surface. Even from this brief review, the stakeholder concept seems constrained by an idealized and organization-primary view.

### **The Stakeholder Organizations**

There are many entities that voluntarily or involuntarily affect or are affected by the Roman Catholic clergy abuse crisis. Some of these stakeholders are individuals (e.g., victim/survivors, judges, journalists), some are groups (e.g., plaintiffs in class action law suits, audit boards, journalistic teams), and some are organizations (e.g., USCCB, SNAP, VOTF). This study focuses exclusively on stakeholder *organizations* in order to decenter the source organization and challenge the managerial-egalitarian paradox in PR.

Further narrowing the study, this dissertation focuses on those organizations most central to the case. Through a broad, detailed reading of media accounts of the crisis, three key organizations stand out: The United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Voice of the Faithful (VOTF), and the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP). There are several reasons these three organizations emerge as central to the case. First, each is named frequently in the media. Second, to a greater or lesser degree, they refer to one another in their verbal and nonverbal communication. Third, each has produced and cached a large amount of crisis-specific communication. Fourth, each plays a key role in the crisis (i.e., source organization, internal dissent organization, and external activist organization). Fifth, (returning to the most basic definition of a stakeholder) each has affected and been affected by the crisis. Although some would criticize demarcating the source organization as a stakeholder, that is essential to decentering the source organization's subject position. Until the source organization is viewed within the same framework as stakeholder organizations, it will retain a privileged position in PR research.

Returning to the organizations, it is evident that each has a particular salience to the case. As the primary governing body of the U.S. Roman Catholic Church, the USCCB may be seen as the Church's organizational representative in this crisis. Its goals include engaging and coordinating Catholic activities in the U.S. (<http://www.usccb.org/whoweare.shtml>). Its decision-making power is evident throughout the crisis, namely in the creation of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and the establishment of the National Review Board. The USCCB

has clearly served as the voice of the American arm of the institutional Catholic Church, and has had high visibility in managing the crisis. It has power to represent and manage the larger Catholic Church in the United States.

Both VOTF and SNAP were formed by (ex)Catholics in direct response to the phenomena of clergy abuse. VOTF's mission is to provide a voice through which the laity can share in church governance. The organization's goals include supporting victims, survivors, and priests of integrity and shaping structural change within the church ([http://www.voiceofthefaithful.org/Who\\_We\\_Are/mission.html](http://www.voiceofthefaithful.org/Who_We_Are/mission.html)). Although it situates itself as a mechanism for bridging the laity and the hierarchy, church officials contest VOTF's position as a Catholic organization.

SNAP is a "volunteer self-help organization of survivors of clergy sexual abuse and their supporters" which works to educate its members and their communities in order to prevent clergy abuse (<http://www.snapnetwork.org/>). Their goals are healing and justice (<http://www.snapnetwork.org/>). Although members of SNAP may be (or have been) Catholic, the organization does not identify itself as Catholic.

### **Selecting the Data**

Having selected the key stakeholder organizations to study, the next decision was identifying and delimiting a data set from their extensive crisis communication. The complexity of this case in particular and of crisis communication in general made this decision challenging. Crisis communication may be generated for external audiences (e.g., press releases, public statements, posting flyers) or internal audiences (e.g., organizational bulletins, memos, emails, newsletters; letters to investors; meetings with

lawyers). It draws on a multitude of media (e.g., face-to-face, electronic, written, visual). It may change across time in response to developments in the crisis and ongoing processes of sense-making. It is likely to be adapted to a variety of audiences. It implicates power and resistance. It may or may not represent a consistent organizational voice. It may or may not be cached or available in its entirety. Its production and dissemination may be constrained by legal action, the presence of a vulnerable population, or a lack of information. It may differ in salience and credibility. In short, crisis communication is complex.

Several factors influenced the dataset selected for this analysis. First, in keeping with the presumption that crisis communication is an organizational phenomenon, the data needed to be a form of organizational discourse. Second, given the sensitive nature of the case (the alleged sexual exploitation of minors which was being pursued in ongoing legal actions and media coverage), it seemed advisable to focus on texts that were publicly accessible.

Third, given the diversity of communication media being used in the case (e.g., member newsletters, press conferences, sermons, letters to the editor, community events), it was important to find a medium that was used consistently across stakeholder organizations throughout the crisis. Fourth, in order to remove the effect that intermediary stakeholders (e.g., the media) have on crisis communication, it was important to study the use of controlled media, or at least discourse that had yet to be adapted and re-released by intermediary stakeholders. Fifth, to tap into the conflictual,



polyvocal construction of the crisis, it was necessary to identify a mode of crisis communication that was accessible to each of the key stakeholder organizations.

Given these constraints, an obvious choice was to focus on the press releases generated by key stakeholder organizations. Not only was this format of discourse used consistently by each of the key stakeholder organizations, but it was cached on each organization's website. In this format, the press releases were both publicly available and untouched by any intermediary organizations (e.g., media outlets). Further, the press releases were ordered chronologically, which meant they could be compared in time.

### **Orienting to the Data**

Since the crisis continues to unfold, it was necessary to delimit the dataset. The analysis presented here focuses on press releases from January 2002 (when the case broke to the public through The Boston Globe's exposé) through June 2005 (when data collection occurred, and at which time each organization was poised to discuss the crisis at its own national conference). The data is comprised of all relevant press releases posted on each organization's website for the delimited three-and-a-half year time period. Since both VOTF and SNAP emerged in direct response to clergy abuse and focus primarily on that issue, all of their press releases were relevant, addressing some aspect of the crisis.

Since the USCCB has a history that precedes and a purpose that supersedes clergy abuse, the process was slightly more complex for this organization. Clergy abuse was only one of a multitude of topics addressed by USCCB press releases, so it was necessary to determine salience on a document-by-document basis. Although some press

releases were obviously irrelevant to the case (e.g., those addressing stem cell research, interfaith dialogues, or assisted suicide) others were less clear. This was often the case in press releases announcing the resignation, (re)appointment, and/or retirement of priests and bishops. Although many of these job changes occurred as a result of allegations of sex abuse allegations or abuse-related diocesan mismanagement, this was not stated in the press releases. It took additional research (generally media searches for further information on the career of the named priest/bishop) to identify which of these press releases were salient to the clergy abuse case and which were not. Of 886 press releases posted by the USCCB during the specified time frame, only 10% were case-specific.

For each organization, press releases were copied directly from the website, ordered chronologically, and saved in a single-spaced Word document. Relevant USCCB press releases (from January 2002 – June 2005) comprised a 140-page document. Relevant VOTF press releases (from July 2002 – June 2005) comprised a 234-page document. Relevant SNAP press releases (from June 2002 - June 2005) comprised a 229-page document. In addition, during the same window of time, SNAP posted enough “press statements” (a category of discourse not used by USCCB or VOTF) to fill a 172-page document. This data collection process yielded a familiarity with the texts, but no formal analysis was conducted at this stage.

Once the data was collected into four documents (one for USCCB, one for VOTF, and two for SNAP), it became necessary to return to research the concept and practice of dialogue. The reading at this phase produced hundreds of pages of notes and abstracts, which were later summarized in Chapter IV. This reading phase set the stage

for the next phase of data analysis. The hundreds of pages of dialogue notes generated at this stage were, as per grounded theory practices, left to percolate, while the data took center stage once again.

The data analysis that followed consisted of a minute reading of the 603 pages of publicly available press releases from USCCB, VOTF, and SNAP. In order to orient to the data, a preliminary tracking of each stakeholder organizations' issue management was conducted. Understanding the construction of issues is a logical starting point, since issue management is a type of PR central to conflict or crisis situations. The framing of issues hinges on four actions by stakeholders: naming, blaming, claiming, and explaining. A frame analysis reveals what issues are named, and how stakeholders demarcate culpability, process blame and accusation, and explicate the issues (Putnam & Kolb, 2000, pp. 91-2). Such an analysis can be revealing on both the organizational level and the inter-organizational level, revealing both the coherence of crisis frames at the organizational level and the contested crisis frames at the inter-organizational level. In this capacity, it served as an orienting method for understanding the points of consensus and dissensus among key stakeholder organizations. However, the a priori nature of this coding scheme stifled the grounded theory goals of the study. Additionally, it offered an insufficient capacity to foreground the interactivity among organizations, offering instead a mechanism for static cross-comparison.

Thus, driven by the goal of taking a dialogical view of the data, the analysis shifted from an issue management approach to an exploration of emergent discursive elements. Among other things, this included tracking emotionality (i.e., the evidence and

treatment of emotions), temporality (i.e., orientations to time), context (e.g., historical and social), voice and silencing, grammatical forms (e.g., invitations vs. imperatives, associational vs. dissociational language), and metacommunication (e.g., explicit references to the use of PR or of dialogue). Note was also taken of where crisis communication was overtly being used dialogically (e.g., where a form of PR was used by one organization to engage other stakeholder groups) versus instances of overt monologism (e.g., where a form of PR was used to make declarations). Although sifting through over 600 pages of data looking for emergent communicative strategies became increasingly cumbersome and unwieldy, it was revealing.

What resulted from this stage of the analysis was a broad understanding of how the stakeholder organizations were using crisis communication. In retrospect, the assessment may be understood as a three level analysis which tracked: 1) what each organization chose to communicate (*content*), 2) how each organization chose to communicate (*process*), and 3) if/how the organizations interacted with one another (*interactivity*). The result was the equivalent of 116 (single-spaced) pages of commentary on the data (22 for UCCB, 44 for VOTF, and 50 for SNAP).

The learning from this stage of the analysis affirmed the potential for an expanded dialogic understanding of crisis communication. There were clear indications of dialogicality in each stakeholder organization's PR. The following lists *some* of the communicative strategies illuminated by a dialogical perspective. According to the emergent coding scheme, stakeholder organizations use public relations discourse to:

- Guidepost
  - Demarcate space in which to keep key questions open and to defer closure.
  - Note events in which stakeholder groups could dialogue.
  - Record their attempts to engage dialogue with one another.
  - Point out media used for dialogue (e.g., webcasts, Ad Hoc committees).
  - Promise future opportunities for dialogue.
  - Delimit communicative interactivity; bound dialogue
  - Mark the direction(s) that dialogue and power are flowing.
  - Mark who is in control of potential dialogue.
  - Mark the (un)typical nature of dialogue.
- Interact
  - Trace turn taking across time and various media.
  - Respond to one another's assertions and interpret one another's actions.
  - Trace 'who talked with whom about what.'
  - Channel their communication through various intermediary audiences.
  - Recap and expand on one another's statements.
  - Set themselves up as communication equals, despite power differentials.
- Invite
  - Invite one another into dialogue, overtly or implicitly.
  - Attempt to bring new players into discursive interaction.
  - Request that one stakeholder address another stakeholder.
  - Act as, name, or note the need for a dialogue facilitator.

- Request involvement in dialogue.
- Wish for or recoil from dialogue.
- Metacommunicate
  - Debate the possibility of dialogue.
  - Comment on a stakeholder's reaction to attempts at discursive interactivity.
  - Mark nonresponsiveness, silence, listening, and interruptions in communication.
  - Report on side-bar conversations.

Each of the functions in this categorization is either overtly or implicitly dialogic.

Just as salient were the strategies stakeholders used to restrict or refuse dialogue (e.g., refusals to disclose information, cancellation of meetings, the exclusion of particular voices, the containment of interaction in time/space, announcements, demands/imperatives). That each of the stakeholder organizations used a variety of strategies to engage or limit dialogicality affirmed the salience of the current project. Next, the literature on dialogue was reviewed in order to frame the emergent model.

### **Construction and Application of Model**

One of the difficulties of carving out a dialogical framework to apply to this dataset was the division in the dialogue literature between micro- and macro-approaches. In light of the numerous communicative strategies unearthed by the preliminary analysis, it seemed essential to craft a model capable of engaging the data at both levels. Ultimately, what emerged was an analytical model guided primarily by Cheney and Christensen's (2001) call for a critical assessment of public relations and by Linell's

(1998) discourse-analytic approach to dialogicality. The emergent framework was comprised of six elements which were roughly grouped into an assessment of discursive context (discursive presence across time, general orientations to dialogic terms, and stakeholder contextualizations of the crisis) and an assessment of discursive interactivity (a comparison of initiative/response patterns to offensive/defensive orientations, (non)topicality, and enabling/constraining responses). The first analysis mapped the temporal, ideological, and sense-making context of the crisis, and the second analysis traced particular discursive strategies in the practice of crisis communication.

The next two chapters review the findings from this two-pronged analysis. Conclusions and implications for an expanded dialogic approach to crisis communication follow that.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **ANALYSIS I: CONTEXT**

As noted, the goal of this study is to craft a dialogical model for understanding the communicative construction (and contestation) of a crisis. With Linell (1998), this study views dialogicality as an epistemological orientation which should not be conflated with dialogue as a type of discourse. Key here is exploring the degree to which PR texts posted on the websites of three of the most vocal organizations in the clergy sex abuse crisis are “mutually other oriented” (Linell, 1998, p. 35).

Recognizing that dialogicality can be evaluated at multiple recursive levels, this study draws on Linell’s (1998) definition of dialogicality as contextualized interactivity (p. 7) to build a two-pronged analysis. This chapter contains a macro analysis which maps the context of the crisis; the next chapter contains a micro analysis which maps the (attempted) discursive interactivity of the crisis. Note, however, that attention to the specifics of language and the breadth of context interweave throughout the analyses, given their recursive natures.

This chapter offers three approaches to tracking the clergy abuse crisis at a broader level. First, it charts each organization’s discursive presence in the case across time, contextualizing how this presence ebbs and flows in the content addressed by each organization. Second, it foregrounds each organization’s ideological orientation to dialogue by tracing political uses of terms associated with dialogic practices. Third, it traces the way in which each organization contextualizes the crisis. When taken together, these analyses serve as a backdrop against which a more particular assessment of the



discursive interactivity of the organizations can be traced. The next chapter offers three mechanisms for tracking (attempts at) interactivity in the dataset.

### **Mapping Discursive Presence**

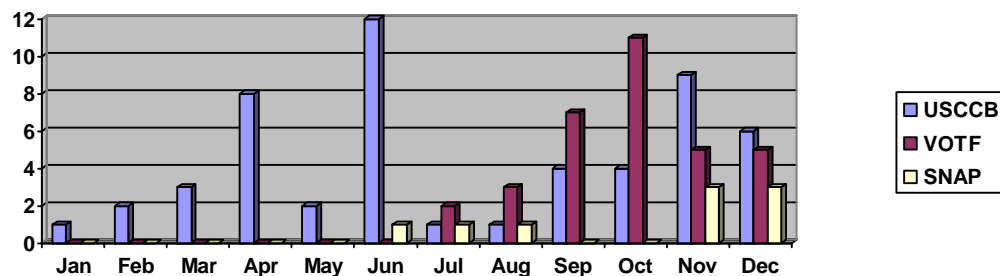
One way to assess the communicative context of a crisis is to track who is producing crisis-related discourse at any given time. In order to track what might be called *discursive presence*, it is necessary to note how many press releases/statements each stakeholder organization produces across a given span of time. Of interest here is how each organization's discursive presence shifts with the lifecycle of the crisis. Bar graphs based on a simple tabulation of each organization's press releases/statements across the crisis (delimited for this study as January 2002 through June 2005) depict the ebb and flow of each group's discursive presence. This, in turn, is contextualized in light of the content each stakeholder organization addresses. This offers a mechanism for visually (and comparatively) mapping changes in the discursive presence of stakeholder organizations across time, an important part of assessing the dialogicality of the crisis. It is important to acknowledge that the use of publicly accessible discourse (i.e., press releases/statements) has an equalizing power here, allowing the researcher to work from a type of PR generated by and equally accessible to the three stakeholder organizations.

Creating comparative charts for the stakeholder organizations' press releases/statements across the duration of the time studied raises interesting questions about how organizations make their discursive presence felt across the lifecycle of a crisis. It may also indicate which points in time are comparatively more salient to a given organization than they are to other organizations. It also reveals ways in which

discursive dominance shifts across time and points at which various stakeholder organizations ‘enter’ and ‘leave’ the larger crisis context. This may indicate points at which an organization deems a crisis worthy of public engagement (perhaps deeming it to have moved from a ‘latent’ to ‘manifest’ phase), and points at which it deems the crisis to be ‘resolved’ (or to have returned to a ‘latent’ or ‘status quo’ phase). Thus, although a broad brush stroke analysis, this is a key step in understanding how multiple stakeholder organizations co-construct a crisis.

Figures 1-4 trace the respective number of press releases/statements for each stakeholder organization for each year analyzed. Implications are discussed for each chart.

**Figure 1**  
**Number of Press Releases/Statements 2002**



In the chart for 2002 (Figure 1), several things stand out. The USCCB is virtually the only ‘speaker’ from January through June. This makes sense, given its position as the ‘source’ organization and VOTF and SNAP’s positions as ‘responder’ organizations.

During the six-month period in which the USCCB predominates, it engages in typical apologia and image restoration discourse in response to allegations of systemic complicity with abuse. The USCCB addresses a rather generic Catholic audience (i.e., the U.S. laity) in its press releases, and portrays itself as actively involved in remediating the problem of clergy sexual abuse. At this time, VOTF is still emerging, and SNAP (still relatively small, but several years old at this point) is inexplicably silent.

In July, there is a shift in which VOTF becomes increasingly vocal, producing more press releases than the USCCB for several months. VOTF has three main foci during this time. Having started as a Boston-based group, it offers a running commentary on how the crisis is unfolding in Boston (the epicenter of the crisis). Also, being an emergent group banned by the hierarchy, much of its PR defends its position and credibility within the Church. On the national level, VOTF's press releases focus on the creation of the USCCB's Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (a.k.a. the Charter). Across these foci, VOTF's PR has a diverse audience, including the hierarchy, the victim/survivor community, the laity, and the general public. The USCCB, again seeming to address a generic lay audience, is equally focused on the creation of the Charter during the second half of 2002. This preoccupation is understandable, given the USCCB's assertion that the Charter is its 'definitive response' to the crisis.

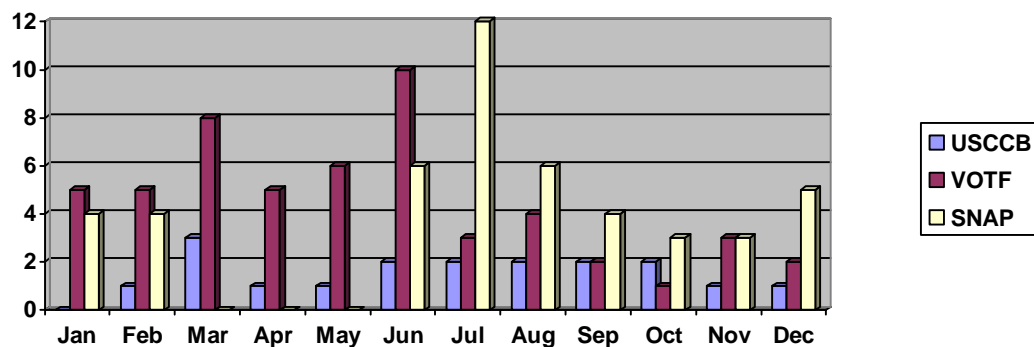
Throughout this first year, SNAP is virtually silent, posting no more than two or three press releases/statements in any given month. What it does post traces the organization's meetings with the USCCB and with officials from the New Jersey Attorney General's office, and its exclusion from the USCCB's National Review Board.

By marking these meetings, SNAP traces its access to and exclusion from key sites of discussion. Like VOTF, SNAP responds to the USCCB's crisis management at this point, levying for certain actions and attempting to set standards for the USCCB's actions.

Clearly the three organizations offer differing discursive presence in the crisis at this stage. Where the USCCB brings a strong presence to bear through its apology, VOTF brings an emerging presence to bear through its pursuit of organizational legitimacy. At least in this venue, SNAP barely affects the crisis at this point.

**Figure 2**

**Number of Press Releases/Statements 2003**



In 2003 (see Figure 2), a clear shift happens. Whereas the USCCB predominated early in 2002, here it pulls back to a steady, low level of participation. The hierarchy's focus at this point shifts to practical, seemingly proactive crisis management steps: the establishment of policies, training and audit programs, and shifts in leadership. The only defensive posting responds to a media fire storm over a recently unearthed 1962 Vatican

document. This document was being cited as evidence of a long-standing policy forbidding church leaders from reporting clergy sex crimes to civil authorities. The USCCB strongly defends the document, thereby defending the global hierarchy's historical management of clergy sexual abuse (CSA).

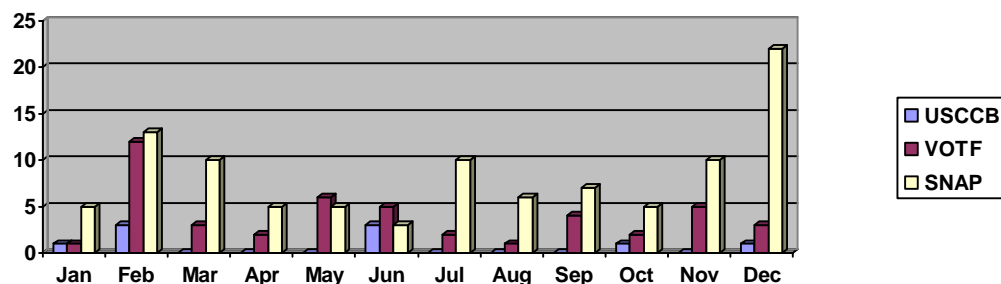
In 2003, VOTF shows a relatively steady presence in the crisis, continuing to comment primarily on events in Boston, with an expanding focus to New England and new affiliates across the United States. The organization divides its focus between responding to actions of the hierarchy (banning VOTF chapters from meeting on church property, USCCB meetings, changes in church leadership, the creation of policies, settling with victims, etc.) and initiating their own actions (funneling lay donations away from hierarchical control, holding meetings and conferences, joining with external coalitions, surveying members and Boston priests, etc.).

SNAP begins this year relatively quiet, much as it did 2002. However, by July, SNAP has overtaken both the other organizations in establishing discursive presence in this genre of PR (press releases/statements posted on the web). Interestingly, SNAP is the only organization of the three to post both press releases and press statements. Whether this is the reason or not, SNAP clearly creates more PR output than the other two organizations in 2003.

From this broad perspective, it becomes evident that there is a shift in the composite discursive presence mid-2003, with the USCCB receding, VOTF staying relatively consistent, and SNAP increasing. Interestingly, SNAP's discourse exhibits a consistent bifurcation from this point forward. Its predominant theme focuses on how the

crisis is enacted in the United States court system. SNAP proactively engages entities in the legal arena, the public, and the Church, consistently positioning the crisis within a legal context. A strong sub-theme in SNAP's PR is a running commentary on the hierarchy's (mis)management of the crisis. More often than it comments on the USCCB's official policies, SNAP comments on the transfer of abusive priests, the stonewalling of diocesan audits, the promotion of complicit bishops, the lack of follow-through on policies, etc. (More will be said about SNAP's use of 'initiatives' in the next chapter.)

**Figure 3**  
**Number of Press Releases/Statements 2004**



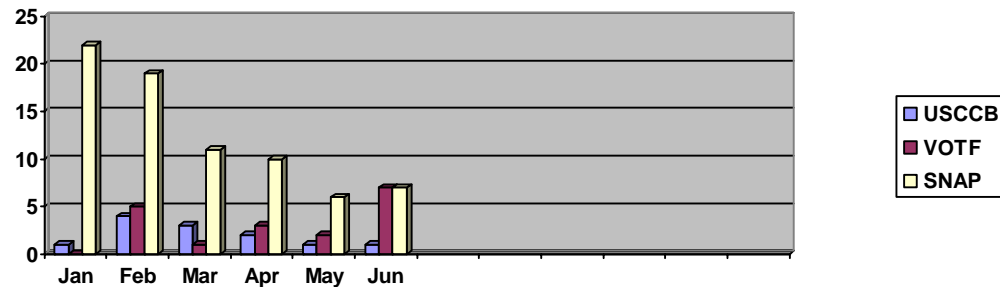
Again in 2004 (see Figure 3), the USCCB maintains a low discursive presence in this venue. Its postings continue to emphasize the implementation of policies, audits, meetings, and reports, and to downplay any de-escalation in its crisis response. The relaxation of the USCCB's focus on the crisis only becomes apparent in the discourse of the other organizations and in a mapping of its discursive presence in the situation. For

its part, the USCCB continues to emphasize its crisis management (e.g., noting that 700 priests and deacons were removed since 2002 in response to the Charter).

VOTF's discursive presence in 2004 is fairly consistent with its presence in 2003. However, its tone begins to be more sharply critical of the hierarchy, paralleling SNAP's critical voice in 2003. VOTF names and criticizes numerous actions taken by the hierarchy, often calling for particular responses. VOTF also introduces a new theme, focusing several postings on financial issues, addressing the hierarchy's lack of financial openness in conjunction with bankruptcy filings in several dioceses. At this point, VOTF has expanded beyond Boston and response to official Church rhetoric to take a more critical, nation-wide stance.

In 2004, a distinction emerges between SNAP's press releases and its press statements. The former frequently levy particular requests for action to a variety of entities; there is a distinct request for interactivity in this discourse. The latter are more consistent with the other organization's press releases, and offer a critical running commentary on the crisis. In both categories of PR, SNAP continues to focus on the hierarchy's actions and on the legal arena. However, at this point, SNAP expands its focus, offering a barrage of salient details and cases and instances and issues across the U.S. (and some around the world). SNAP is clearly the most specific, broadly aware, and verbose entity in this venue at this point.

**Figure 4**  
**Number of Press Releases/Statements 2005**



By the last year of analysis (see Figure 4), the USCCB has virtually removed itself from the arena. Although it is difficult to determine the exact turning point, the USCCB has clearly returned to normal operations. Everything about its discursive presence in 2005 positions the crisis in the past; the USCCB clearly marks the crisis as having moved to a low level maintenance issue. It presents data from its internal audits, tracks changes in leadership salient to the crisis, notes the status of policies created in response to the crisis, and previews an upcoming meeting of the hierarchy. Overall, the way the USCCB addresses the crisis in 2005 marks the hierarchy marks as having returned to business-as-usual.

For VOTF, 2005 marks a reduction in its discursive presence as well. During this six-month period, VOTF's discourse continues to expand its focus. The organization responds to a USCCB request for feedback on improving the Charter, comments on SNAP's criticism of a Ford Motor Company ad exploiting the crisis, calls the USCCB to open up about Charter revisions, and comments on a relevant trial. It also comments on



Pope John Paul's death, surveys VOTF members on the new pope, and criticizes the Vatican for allowing Cardinal Law (resigned archbishop of Boston) to participate in the Pope's funeral services.

SNAP continues to produce a high amount of discourse in 2005, naming a wide array of issues on the national and global level. It comments on many of the same issues as VOTF, while continuing to track numerous legal developments around the country (and world). It continues to orient to the crisis both as critical commentator and as participant, making specific requests for interactivity, especially of representatives of the hierarchy. It is interesting to note that in June, when the USCCB has its General Meeting, SNAP and VOTF are equally present in this discursive venue, but the USCCB is nearly absent.

Although general, the preceding discussion provides an important overview of the communicative terrain of the clergy sex abuse crisis by charting the discursive presence of three stakeholder organizations from January 2002 through June 2005. The picture that emerges is what might be expected in any crisis. The source organization is strongly present in the beginning, engaging in traditional apologia. Then, having presented what it deems to be sufficient PR and policy responses, it subtly decreases its presence in the crisis, shifting to informative updates and progress reports, thus marking its intent to return to status quo. At this point, the source organization positions itself as having returned to normal, the crisis well in hand if not resolved, and its presence no longer necessary in any on-going discussion of the crisis. For the USCCB, image management seems to be primary.

Not surprisingly, as an emergent grassroots organization, VOTF's discursive presence in the crisis seems to follow a bell curve. It is not present in the beginning, peaks in the middle as it finds its voice as an organization, then settles back into a lower discursive presence as its focus (at least in this venue) seems to dissipate to some degree. As an organization that emerged in response to the crisis, it is not formed enough to be discursively present until mid-2002. At that point, its focus is primarily on its organizational identity, a prerequisite to establishing any substantive discursive presence in the crisis. Once its identity is somewhat established, VOTF briefly dominates this discursive arena. However, it quickly settles back down into a lesser, albeit steady, presence. VOTF's major focus throughout is on establishing its identity and challenging the identity of the Church.

SNAP is an interesting study. Although its existence is directly responsive to the crisis of clergy sexual abuse and predates the 2002 *Boston Globe* exposé, it is a late entry into this discursive arena. It is not until mid-2003 that SNAP makes its presence substantively felt. However, at this point, SNAP becomes a powerhouse, expanding the scope of the crisis without losing focus on the key issues, and maintaining a strong national/global awareness. SNAP's presence consistently increases across time, and its primary focus seems to be on managing the issue of clergy sexual abuse.

### **Mapping Ideological Orientations to Dialogue**

A second way to trace the communicative context of the clergy sex abuse crisis is to assess each stakeholder organization's ideological orientation to dialogue. By comparing each organization's espoused value for dialogic communication with the

dialogicality of its enacted communication, it is possible to trace each organization's ideological orientation to dialogue. Cheney and Christensen (2001) argue that distinguishing between 'political' uses of dialogical terminology and a dialogical orientation to discourse is a crucial step in distinguishing between attempts to evoke a dialogical image and attempts to dialogue. Given the currency that dialogue has as a concept in the organizational world, it is likely that most managers will speak well of dialogue. However, it is essential to discern (by an assessment of their actual discourse) whether this is a cooptation of the term, or an indicator of a truly dialogical orientation.

Interestingly, the current dataset is permeated with references to dialogue and its correlates (e.g., *collaboration*, *community*, *teamwork*, and *discussion*). It is only by tracing the dialogicality in each organization's actual communication practices that it is possible to determine where these references underscore a dialogical orientation to crisis communication and where they serve strategic or 'political' purposes in the crisis. There may be a greater or lesser correspondence between an organization's talk about dialogue and its enactment of dialogic forms of communication. For example, an organization may describe itself as inclusive of all points of view, yet strictly guard access to decision-making. Alternately, an organization might support its rhetoric of 'team-based communication' with a decentralized structure. Key here is comparing what an organization says about dialogue (and its forms) with the ways in which it actually communicates. How this plays out in each of the three key stakeholder organizations is addressed below.

## USCCB

In the clergy abuse case, each organization uses the term *dialogue* differently. For the USCCB, dialogue is seldom referred to directly. This absence in and of itself may be revealing, given the USCCB's position of power and its focus on crisis resolution. More common terms are those indicating decision-making processes (e.g., *meeting*) or religious connections (e.g., *communion, church, body*). Where these words or the term *dialogue* appear, they are used in several ways.

### *Dialogue as Image Management*

First, it is important to assess the ways in which the USCCB uses dialogic terms (e.g., *cooperation* and *meeting*) to craft a particular image of the Catholic Church in general or the USCCB in particular. This seems to be the most common use of dialogical terms by the USCCB. In the next two quotes, the emphasis is on the hierarchy meeting with victims/survivors to hear them. The emphasis on pastoral listening clearly indicates a positive image of the hierarchy. The picture that emerges here is of a leadership (here equated with the Church) actively co-present and listening to victims/survivors.

As a Church, we have met with those who are victims of sexual abuse by priests. We have heard their sorrow, confusion, anger, and fear. We have tried to reach out pastorally and sensitively not only to victims of this outrageous behavior, but to their families and the communities devastated by this crime. (Bishop Gregory statement; USCCB, 2002, February 19)

[The Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse] sponsored meetings with victims and victims' organizations, and its representatives attended their national meetings. (USCCB, 2002, September 5)

In a similar vein, the next two quotes position relationship, commitment, and cooperation as mechanisms for potential renewal in the Church. What emerges is a glowing image of the Church (i.e., the hierarchy) interfacing with “its people” (note the possessive language) in a healing, restorative manner.

"It is clear that the Church is facing an opportunity to renew its relationship with its people, to restore trust and to strengthen its commitment to the faithful," Archbishop Flynn wrote. "We are confronting a wonderful opportunity for ultimate healing..." (USCCB, 2002, April 19)

"The USCCB's Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People adopted by the Church in the United States last spring was a welcome milestone in our continuing effort to cooperate with our priests and with our church members to ensure that all our children are protected from harm.... We will have the certainty that we can move forward in justice and compassion as a real community of clergy and laity." (Bishop Gregory; USCCB, 2002, November 13)

Additionally, the USCCB paints an image of itself as collaborating on a grander social scale. Here, the USCCB is portrayed as working with other social institutions to address child abuse in society. Again, collaboration is treated as a tool for addressing the problem of clergy sexual abuse.

The draft Charter also contains a proposal that the USCCB "cooperate with other churches, institutions of learning, and other interested organizations in conducting a major research study" about sexual abuse of children and young people in our society. (USCCB, 2002, June 4)

"... participants agreed to seek ways in the future to cooperate together in order to take even more dramatic steps on the specific issue of abuse of children and young people in church and society." (USCCB, 2002, June 7)

...The AHCSA [Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse] originated formal consultations with other bishops' conferences of English-speaking countries and participated in other international church consultations on the problem. (USCCB, 2002, September 19)

Clearly, the hierarchy is positioning itself as a cooperative, solution-oriented participant in both the religious world and society at large.

Another image created by dialogic terminology is that of Catholic unity. Here, the primary emphasis is on U.S. alignment with Rome. In the quote below, note that the National Review Board (NRB), the USCCB, priests, the laity, indeed, “the entire Church” (here, the Vatican and the USCCB) are described as positioned to collaborate on enacting the Charter.

The National Review Board is comforted by the overall support given by the Vatican to the efforts of the American bishops to end this ugly chapter of clerical sexual abuse. Clearly the entire Church is united .... We stand ready to assist in any way as the Dallas Charter is further refined in accord with Rome's direction. Once that work is completed next month, there will be an urgent need for all American Catholics - bishops, priests, and laity alike - to give life to the charter with strong action and resolve. We members of the review board rededicate ourselves to fulfilling our part of that promise. (NRB statement; USCCB 2002, October 18)

This image of Catholic unity is underscored by an emphasis on bonds of communion.

This paints an image of the Catholic Church as truly catholic (i.e., united globally).

The genuine ecclesial communion between the Episcopal Conference and the Apostolic See, demonstrated once again in these painful circumstances, prompts us all to pray earnestly to God that from the present crisis might emerge, as the Holy Father has stated: "a holier priesthood, a holier episcopate, and a holier Church" .... In this way, the bonds of communion which unite the bishops with their priest and deacons, and the faithful with their pastors, will be further strengthened. (Cardinal Re; USCCB, 2002, December 8)

However, note the subtle variations in unity here. The USCCB is united to the Vatican, the bishops, priests, and deacons are united, and the laity is united with its pastors. These subtle demarcations in the hierarchy's view of catholic unity are important, and will be addressed in the concluding chapter.

Despite subtle gradations in its conceptualization of the Church, the USCCB's PR uses dialogic terms to craft an image of a globally unified Church that is being renewed internally and collaborating externally. The USCCB clearly uses dialogic terms to craft a positive image.

*Dialogue as Decision-Making and Directives*

The USCC also applies dialogic terms to describe the bishops' decision-making. Here, they denote pragmatic aspects of crisis management. These references position dialogue as an internal communication function of the hierarchy, as the following quotes indicate.

"The full body will be asked to consider how these principles can be further developed and whether additional principles should be formulated as the foundation for future action." (USCCB, 2002, March 14)

...144 (or 74 percent of all dioceses) reported having been in dialogue with the Major Superiors of Religious regarding the status of members in religious life. (USCCB, 2002, September 19)

The Holy See requested further reflection and revision by a "mixed commission" made up of four representatives of the Holy See and four representatives of the USCCB. The Mixed Commission met in Rome ... and the results of its work were discussed and approved by the full body of U.S. bishops. (USCCB, 2002, December 16)

Dialogue, in these examples, is positioned as a mechanism for managerial decision-making, and is frequently conflated with a discussion or meeting.

The USCCB also uses dialogic terms in an implicitly commanding way when directed to the laity. Consonant with its position of power in the crisis, the USCCB periodically impels Catholics to serve the hierarchy's goals. In these instances, the

USCCB uses *dialogue* and associated terms to set the standard for expected behavior by members of the church, as the following examples indicate.

This is a time for Catholic people bishops, clergy, religious, and laity to resolve to work together to assure the safety of our children. (USCCB, 2002, February 19)

As we pursue this common work for the safety of our children and for the good of society and the Church we love, let us continue to remember one another before the Lord in prayer and in charity. (Bishop Gregory statement; USCCB, 2002, February 19)

All Christians must work together in seeking to find ways to offer healing to those who have been so wounded and to restore the faithful to the faith that has been taken from them by these actions (USCCB, 2002, June 7)

Note that in each of the quotes above, there is an implicit command for Catholics, and that several of them require the collaborative work of the laity and the hierarchy. Here, collaboration is commanded and it is portrayed as essential for crisis resolution.

A different picture emerges as the USCCB addresses SNAP, the stakeholder organization self-identified as external to the Catholic Church. Note the following quote.

[Bishop Gregory] said today that he would consider the participation of the Survivors' Network for those Abused by Priests (SNAP) in a dialogue to take place between victims and the Conference's Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse and a delegation of Cardinals. ... Now that SNAP has announced that it is withdrawing its participation in the lawsuit, the USCCB and the organization will be in contact about re-framing the planned discussion. (USCCB, 2002, June 10)

Here, dialogue is a resource that the USCCB controls and can portion out at will. Note that the USCCB considers SNAP for inclusion in the dialogue only upon withdrawing from a lawsuit against the Church. Clearly, the USCCB directs other stakeholders through either mandating or controlling access to dialogue. (The next chapter addresses the issue of power more fully.)



Although not addressed with great frequency, the USCCB does name dialogue and associated terms in its discourse. The idealized image of a dialogic Church that emerges stands in rather stark opposition to the use of dialogic terms to either mandate catholic collaboration or demarcate decisions as accessible only to the hierarchy. In the USCCB's press releases, there is a chasm between image-enhancing uses of dialogic terms and the use of dialogic processes as a mechanism of control. Interestingly, dialogic terms do not appear in later USCCB press releases, perhaps indicating the USCCB's primary application of dialogical terms as a strategy for image management early in the crisis.

## **VOTF**

The term *dialogue* appears more frequently in VOTF's discourse than in that of the USCCB, and appears throughout the period studied. As does the USCCB, VOTF uses dialogic terminology to promote a particular image of itself. Here, the image is of a willing participant in the crisis management process. VOTF also promotes the problem-solving capacity of dialogue, often positioning dialogue as both the ultimate goal and the means to attain that goal. As with the USCCB, dialogue is equated with discussions and meetings; it is portrayed as an ongoing process that requires mutual respect and listening. VOTF notes "sidebar" discussions it has with other organizations (stakeholder or otherwise), just as the USCCB does. At times, VOTF speaks out against the hierarchy's restricting access to dialogue (e.g., in their frustration over bannings). At other times, VOTF accepts the hierarchy's management of dialogue, simply expressing

gratitude for any dialogic opportunities that are extended and availability for additional dialogic meetings.

*Dialogue as Image Management*

As noted, dialogic terminology is used in VOTF's press releases to portray the organization as a willing participant in crisis management. Where the USCCB comments on dialogue as an abstract ideal or reports on past dialogues (thus making them inaccessible to other stakeholders), VOTF repeatedly asks, hints, or demands to be invited to the table. VOTF's discourse makes it clear the organization is functioning from a lower power position; by looking to the hierarchy for access to the dialogue, VOTF indicates the USCCB's control of the discursive situation. Note the image of VOTF that emerges in the following quotes.

...we wish to contribute positively through ongoing dialogue and insistence that the Church is all the people of God - pope, bishops, clergy, religious and lay - working together for our common good, for justice, reconciliation, healing, and a stronger Church. (VOTF, 2002, November 13)

... Voice of the Faithful stands ready to meet with Bishop Lennon in response to his desire to further discussions that have occurred over the past seven months. (Post; VOTF, 2002, December 18)

We need a blueprint to heal the Catholic Church. Voice of the Faithful stands ready to begin that work today. (Post; VOTF, 2002, December 13)

This is an opportunity to involve the laity in answering "why?" and in creating plans to solve these problems. A shared responsibility to find the answers would strengthen the faith of all participants while fortifying the whole community. We are ready and able to be a part of finding those answers, in examining the problems with a clear and reasoned voice, and to find solutions in the spirit of collaboration inside the universal Church. (VOTF, 2004, November 18)

The image of VOTF that emerges here is of a willing, helpful, stubbornly committed, participative part of the Church. The image of the Church that emerges from VOTF's PR

is that of a democratic organization in which all members (ought to) have a say. As a result, VOTF offers itself as part of the dialogical solution to clergy sexual abuse (and related dilemmas).

*Dialogue as Collaborative yet Constrained*

In contrast to the USCCB, VOTF frequently uses the term *dialogue*, positioning it as essential to crisis resolution. For VOTF, dialogue is both the means and the end goal, as is evident in the following quotes.

"We love our Church dearly, and all we have sought from the beginning was open and honest dialogue with our bishops" (Vellante; VOTF, 2002, September 30)

"VOTF is committed to open dialogue, especially with those who disagree with us. We are providing a forum for healthy exchange which we would like to see in the Catholic Church. We believe that we grow in faith when we listen to each other." (Zouvelenkis; VOTF, 2003, February 11)

Not only is dialogue positioned as essential to crisis resolution and as VOTF's ultimate goal, but it is also described as collaborative. Although this seems obvious, it is important to address, since it foregrounds VOTF's dependence on at least four groups (hierarchy, laity, clergy, and victim/survivors) to achieve its goal. According to VOTF:

Solutions need the "sunlight" of truth and reconciliation in order to bring about healing. Solutions must involve collaboration among the laity, priests, religious, and hierarchy ... Healing requires listening to one another, to survivors and their families, to priests, religious, and to the laity – women and men of good will who share a responsibility for the well-being of the Church. We must listen to one another; we must have real and honest dialogue; we must cooperate in shaping solutions. (Post; VOTF, 2002, December 13)

"...U.S. bishops as pastoral leaders need to provide strong leadership in order to bring all sides together — bishops, priests, survivors and laity — in an open and honest dialogue. This collaboration will serve to bring a swift conclusion to this Catholic sexual abuse crisis." (Post; VOTF, 2002, October 18)

As noted, where VOTF looks to the hierarchy to engender dialogue, it acknowledges the power differential between the hierarchy and itself. Thus, VOTF finds itself in a double-bind, since what it deems essential is not under its control. At best, VOTF can construct an image of itself as a willing participant in crisis management and invite the hierarchy into dialogue. (Again, more will be said about the discursive enactment of this power differential in the next chapter.)

VOTF also responds through a running commentary on the hierarchy's control of dialogue. Early in the crisis, this commentary centers on archbishops banning VOTF from meeting on church property throughout New England. In response to the bannings, VOTF leverages Pope John Paul's statements about the importance of meaningful lay participation and dialogue in church life, as the following quote shows.

"We hold that banishment of persons who in no way have been found guilty of any deviation from faith or discipline is destructive to the internal life of the Catholic community and is in flagrant contradiction to the spirit of dialogue that Pope John Paul II continuously advocates and demands." (Post letter; VOTF, n.d., "Voice of the Faithful Names")

Here, VOTF calls out the disparity between Pope John Paul's image of a dialogic Church and its control of resources. VOTF sees this disparity as extending beyond the (former) Pope's vision of a dialogic Church to a general understanding of a dialogic Church:

... Steve Krueger called this tactic [bannings], "a subtle form of excommunication that delegitimizes ecumenical dialogue and hurts all Catholics." (VOTF, 2002, November 10)

...the bannings represent the hierarchy's manipulation of the faithful in their diocese, not their openness to listen to them. .... the bannings contradict the requirements for a collaborative church by stifling dialogue. (Krueger; VOTF, 2003, January 6)

At times, VOTF's PR goes into great detail tracing the discrepancy between this stonewalling and the hierarchy's politically correct use of *dialogue*.

...your letter states that "at the present time, the Archbishop, Cardinal Law, is in dialogue with the leaders of VOTF through his Vicar General, Bishop Edyvean." This is not true. There is no dialogue at the present time. In fact, there have been no meetings between Bishop Edyvean and leaders of Voice of the Faithful since June 28, 2002. Since then we have attempted to schedule meetings with Bishop Edyvean without success. Bishop Edyvean was invited to speak at our convention on July 20, 2002; he declined. Moreover, he or Cardinal Law instructed members of the Chancery staff not to meet with Voice of the Faithful officials. By any reasonable definition, this pattern of behavior does not qualify as a "dialogue." ...

To my knowledge, you have not contacted anyone from Voice of the Faithful to inquire as to the truthfulness of the accusations lodged against us, nor to provide us any opportunity to respond. The logic of your action might reasonably be summarized as follows: "While these issues remain unresolved in this dialogue" one partner in the "dialogue" finds the other partner guilty for causing "scandal" and punishes the partner through a "banning" order. (Post letter to Bishop Allue; VOTF, 2002, October 3)

Stepping away from the hierarchy's image of a dialogic Church, VOTF offers its own frank response to the bannings, as represented by the following quote:

"In the midst of the worst crisis facing the Catholic Church in its entire 500-year history in North America, it is astonishing that some bishops and Catholic educators think the best solution is to ban Catholics from gathering on church property to talk about the Church's problems. ... Catholic leaders need to stop preventing open and honest dialogue. They should join with Voice of the Faithful and thousands of Catholic laity across the country, to promote and foster effective healing via community discussions." (Post; VOTF, 2003, January 16)

Even where VOTF is invited into some type of 'dialogue' with an arm of the hierarchy, indications of the hierarchy's politicized orientation to dialogue emerge, as the following quotes show. The first two comments were made after a 'landmark' meeting between National Review Board chair Governor Keating and representatives of

the survivor community, VOTF, and SNAP; the third comment was made after VOTF's first meeting with Boston Archbishop O'Malley.

“Bishops need to listen to survivors and grassroots organizations. I don't see what's wrong with open dialogue – we can't talk too much.” (Gov. Keating; VOTF, 2002, October 4)

“The governor heard and seemed to agree that victims need to be listened to by the bishops, in the same way we have been listened to by Voice of the Faithful.” (Webb, SNAP member; VOTF, 2002, October 4)

“Previously closed doors were opened, with dialogue towards mutual collaboration on several fronts.” (Krueger; VOTF, 2003, November 19)

In the first two quotes, VOTF strategically amplifies representatives from the hierarchy and from SNAP to mark the bishops' hesitancy to dialogue. The implication is that the bishops are not engaging in dialogic behaviors, but ought to be. Even in celebrating a move to dialogue (in the third quote), VOTF marks dialogue as an atypical experience with the hierarchy.

What is interesting in the way in which VOTF uses dialogic terminology is the organization's mix of naïve idealism and rugged pragmatism. Although it is generally precluded from interactions with the hierarchy, even to the extent of being banned from meeting on church properties, VOTF never questions dialogue's power to heal. For VOTF, the problem and the solution are equally obvious: (getting to) dialogue. The organization is as vocal about the ideal of dialogue as it is about the constraints it faces accessing dialogue.

## **SNAP**

SNAP, like the USCCB, makes few direct references to dialogue. Instead, it frequently calls for disclosures (by the USCCB) and describes meetings or discussions

that have already taken place. SNAP does not present an idealized, messianic notion of dialogue, as do the USCCB and VOTF. Perhaps due to its nature as a support group-based organization, dialogue is a specific type of discourse for SNAP. It is an intimate, face-to-face encounter based on openness, disclosure, and listening. Like VOTF, SNAP chafes against the control the hierarchy exerts over dialogue, emphasizing the futility of dialogue without openness.

### *Dialogue as Image Management*

It is important to note that SNAP operates in both the legal arena and the victim/survivor support arena. Although SNAP does not use dialogic terms for image management nearly as much as the USCCB does, it does draw on dialogic terms to reinforce its image as a victim/survivor support group. The following quotes extend the image of a group engaged in therapeutic dialogue to interactions between SNAP and the hierarchy.

"We believe that our best chance of reaching the Cardinals' hearts is in an intimate setting like this. We hope to have a very frank dialogue." (Blaine; SNAP, 2002, June 6)

...Survivors are expected to provide brief personal introductions, discuss the impact that childhood sexual abuse has had on their lives, and offer suggestions on how the Church can help victims to heal and prevent future abuse. (SNAP, 2002, June 6)

We're asking each member of [the National Review Board] to spend just two hours sometime in the next two months sitting in one of our support group meetings. It's a simple request, but a crucial one. Because without this experience, without directly listening to the pain and the experiences victims are going through right now, all this can easily become a dispassionate intellectual endeavor, a discussion of policies and procedures and canon law and psychological theories. . . One of our ground rules is "No one has to speak. Listening is a gift too." We don't want board members to come and give a speech. We just want them to hear us. (Blaine; SNAP, 2003, July 29)

SNAP believes victims of female clergy abuse may be more apt to come forward if the topic of female abusers is thoroughly discussed and victims allowed the chance to use their voice. (SNAP, 2004, July 13)

There is an interesting dance going on here, as support group meets power. In the third quote, note how National Review Board members are silenced in order to listen to victim/survivors. Here, SNAP takes the position of dialogue facilitator, coaching the hierarchy on how to participate in this type of dialogue. This simultaneously indicates and trumps the power differential between the hierarchy and SNAP, which leads to the next use of dialogic terminology.

*Dialogue as Controlled by the Hierarchy*

As does VOTF, SNAP offers some amount of commentary on how the hierarchy manages dialogue. Interestingly, several of their references are commendations of particular leaders who engage dialogue with the victim/survivor community. Although VOTF officially celebrates ‘Priests of Integrity,’ it is SNAP that lauds leaders who dialogue. The following quotes, although celebrating rare examples, indicate leaders whose actions affirm the image of a dialogical Church.

[SNAP cites] Bishop Frank Rodimer ... who held the first open listening session with survivors.... Archbishop Timothy Dolan ...who held two "listening sessions," for abuse victims, their families and parishioners, which were planned with SNAP members and community leaders, including the district attorney.... Bishop Mulvee ...and his staff, who listened to several dozen survivors one-on-one, face-to-face during settlement talks. (SNAP, 2002, November 12)

“Bishop Bootkoski has agreed to an ongoing dialogue where SNAP representatives can offer input and criticism on the Diocese of Metuchen in its efforts to comply with the new church policy on child sexual abuse by church personnel.” (Kelly; SNAP, 2003, February 6)



“... Though there is more work to be done in his diocese, we have the opportunity for an ongoing dialogue with this bishop and a seat at his table for further improvements.” (Serrano; SNAP, 2003, June 20)

Just as SNAP affirms how particular leaders manage dialogue, it calls out those who preclude dialogue. Some present one-sided statements, others prevent access to open forums, as the following quotes show.

"Wuerl has proven he is capable of spending lots of money in the court of public opinion to discuss the clergy abuse crisis. As shepherd of the Pittsburgh flock, he sent a terrible message last night that clergy-abuse survivors are unworthy of being heard.... Such one-sided 'spin-control' commercials run counter to the message and teaching of Jesus." (Clohessy; SNAP, 2004, March 5)

“... One thing needs to [be] made clear: this dreadful decision...was made by the Albany Diocesan Sexual Misconduct Review Board without even bothering to meet and discuss the incident with the victim. ... Bishop Hubbard ...refuses to provide clergy abuse victims an open forum to discuss their own abuse.” (Furnish; SNAP, 2004, March 7)

Comments such as these corroborate VOTF’s criticism of the Church’s control of dialogue. Interestingly, although positioning itself as external to the Church, SNAP defers to the hierarchy’s control of the discourse by asking for permission to enter certain discussions. In this way, SNAP seems to acknowledge a similar position to VOTF: dependent on the hierarchy for access to the table. This is emphasized in the following example, in which SNAP and VOTF speak together:

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) and Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) are calling on the U.S. Catholic bishops to open up their discussions of sexual abuse in June to public scrutiny and participation. (SNAP, 2004, May 31)

The organization’s dependence on the hierarchy for access to dialogue is also evident when SNAP speaks on its own:

In a separate letter sent today to Monsignor Ford, SNAP leaders ask for an opportunity to meet with St. Mary's parishioners to discuss the controversy. (SNAP, 2004, August 19)

... Please help see that it [the diocesan audit process] is at least re-examined in a full, careful public discussion, if not fully reversed. (Blaine & Clohessey letter to Bishop Skylstad; SNAP, 2004, November 24)

... we respectfully urge you to delay any such decision and spend the next few weeks in genuine dialogue with Spokane Catholics about the needs of all parties involved. (Harding letter to Bishop Skylstad; SNAP, 2004, December 1)

Thus, despite being external to the Church, SNAP largely defers to the hierarchy's power over dialogue. Although SNAP seems to chafe at this control, it does not directly problematize it. Instead, the organization asks the hierarchy to manage dialogue in a more open, supportive, listening-centric (i.e., therapeutic) way.

The preceding discussion sets the stage for how each stakeholder orients to the notion and practice of dialogue. Each uses dialogic terminology for political or image-building purposes. Each also traces the (USCCB's) enactment or control of what it deems to be dialogue in the case. What emerges from this section is an idea of the ideological context within which the crisis unfolds. In concert, the discourse of the three organizations about dialogue is mutually revealing. The USCCB boasts of being dialogic, yet is outed by VOTF's story of stonewalling. VOTF trumpets an inclusive dialogue as messianic, yet finds itself excluded by the USCCB. SNAP tries to barter its submission to the USCCB's control of dialogic opportunities for the USCCB's submission to SNAP's therapeutic model of dialogue. Each is undeniably reliant on the others in this genre of communication.

### **Mapping Communicatively Constructed Contexts**

A third way to map the context of a crisis is to compare how each stakeholder organization contextualizes the crisis. At the micro level, Linell (1998) analyzes whether an utterance is in line with the preceding context. Given the asynchronous nature of mediated crisis communication, this is a bit difficult in the current case. However, by identifying the primary context(s) created or referenced by each stakeholder organization, it is possible to discover key frames used to make sense of the crisis. It is also possible to discover ways in which the stakeholders share or contest a given context. This, in turn, will indicate some ways in which the communicatively constructed context serves to constrain and/or enable crisis management. By mapping the various contexts referenced by each stakeholder, it is possible to stake out the broadest contested boundary within which stakeholders strive to make sense of the crisis.

In the clergy abuse case, each organization evidences a primary context, each of which affects how that organization names, manages, and seeks to resolve the crisis. Key contexts for each stakeholder organization are presented below, with implications for how they might work together to bound the crisis.

#### **USCCB**

The USCCB consistently contextualizes the clergy abuse crisis in their policy history. By addressing the problem as one of which they have been aware for some time, they are able to frame it as under their control. They do this by emphasizing their managerial response to the crisis, as the following examples indicate.

A description of two decades of efforts by the nation's Catholic bishops to address the problem of sex abuse in the Church and to assist those who have been

affected by it is now available. ... "to provide a comprehensive and readily accessible resource on this topic to those who are interested in knowing what has transpired," said Msgr. Francis Maniscalco.... "There has been a dramatic improvement in the handling of these cases..." he said. (USCCB, 2002, February 15)

"Over the past two decades, the bishops of the United States have worked diligently to learn all we can about sexual abuse. Our Conference has encouraged the development of policies in every diocese to address this issue. Bishops have developed procedures whereby priests moving from one diocese to another must have certification of their good standing. Bishops have also revised seminary screening and have mandated in-service programs for priests, teachers, parish ministers and volunteers to emphasize their responsibility to protect the innocent and vulnerable from such abuse. Dioceses have implemented programs to ensure safe environments in parishes and schools. While we have made some tragic mistakes, we have attempted to be as honest and open about these cases as we can, especially in following the law on these matters and cooperating with civil authorities. We remain committed to seeing these initiatives implemented fully...." (Bishop Gregory; USCCB, 2002, February 19)

Consistently, the bishops address the crisis as a topic of which they are well aware and on which they have a history of proactive (if regrettably imperfect) management. Although this positions the crisis within the bishops' control, it does so at the risk of implicating them. Indeed, one of the key issues of this chapter in the Church's history with sexual abuse is the systemic complicity of its leaders. Although the bishops contest hierarchical complicity in their PR, they implicitly affirm this accusation by contextualizing the crisis as an ongoing, well-known issue.

Perhaps in order to redeem the evident admission of complicity, the USCCB also contextualizes sexual abuse as an inevitable social ill. Note how the bishops broaden the scope of the crisis by contextualizing it as international, inevitable, and social.

"This is a large step forward from what we did during the last decade," Archbishop Flynn said. "We established good principles then, but we didn't provide for a way to be accountable to our people and to one another nationally

for what is so clearly a national -- even international -- problem." (USCCB, 2002, June 6)

"Sadly, we are faced with the fact that evil does harm the innocent, something which human life has faced since the beginning of time. This is a reality against which we must be ceaselessly on guard." (Bishop Gregory; USCCB, 2002, February 19)

...The draft Charter also contains a proposal that the USCCB "cooperate with other churches, institutions of learning, and other interested organizations in conducting a major research study" about sexual abuse of children and young people in our society. (USCCB, 2002, June 4)

"It was clear from the meeting that the Roman Catholic Church and its bishops do not stand alone in the painful experience of dealing with sexual misconduct among clergy and lay leaders in the church. The Catholic Church shares with the wider ecumenical community deep concern for the victims of sexual abuse, especially children and young people. ...participants agreed to seek ways in the future to cooperate together in order to take even more dramatic steps on the specific issue of abuse of children and young people in church and society." (USCCB, 2002, June 7)

In this paradoxical way, the USCCB retains the image of being in control of the crisis while dissociating from it. The bishops contextualize clergy sexual abuse as well-under their control while redirecting attention from clergy sexual abuse in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church to clergy sexual abuse in the ecumenical community or to sexual abuse in society. When contextualized this way, the USCCB appears in control of, yet not entirely responsible for the crisis.

## **VOTF**

Two primary contexts are constructed in VOTF's PR discourse. The first is that of Catholicism. Here, VOTF emphasizes its submission to the hierarchy and the teachings of the Church. Typically, this is based on references to Vatican II or particular comments by Pope John Paul, as the following quotes illustrate.

“The intent of Voice of the Faithful has been from the beginning to work for a greater participation of the laity in the operations of the Church. This work is inspired by Catholic traditions, animated by Catholic doctrines, and always within the framework of the Church's constitutional structures. We are convinced that such fidelity is the best way to safeguard the unity of the Faithful while honoring the great diversity of God's gifts among his people. We see our movement as an expression of the widely spread aspiration in the Catholic Church to see the insights and desires of Vatican Council II implemented in a practical way.” (Post; VOTF, n.d., “Voice of the Faithful Names”)

We agree with Pope John Paul II’s statement, “There is no place in the priesthood or religious life for those who would harm the young.” ... Pope John Paul II has called sexual abuse by clergy a “crime” - and it is. (VOTF, 2003, August 31)

In these quotes, VOTF contextualizes both its role in the crisis and the crisis itself. Both are situated within the global Catholic Church, albeit a version of that Church demarcated by Vatican II and Pope John Paul.

An interesting twist on this context emerges in VOTF’s merging of U.S. democratic ideals with Catholicism. Where relying on a Catholic context positions VOTF as deferential to the hierarchy, levying a democratic context positions VOTF as empowered. Note the shift in the following quote.

American Catholics are the beneficiaries of two powerful sets of ideas. From our national democratic tradition, we have learned that freedom is important; that accountability is essential; and that free speech and the right of assembly are fundamental rights. From our Catholic faith, we have learned that morality matters, that individual conscience is critical, and that we have baptismal responsibility to work for the good of our Church.

This is the DNA that we share as American Catholics in 2002. Like the double helix, these ideas are entwined in our belief system and in our lives. We believe in these ideas. And because we believe in these ideas -and the values they represent — we are responsible to see they become values in practice. (Post; VOTF, 2002, October 29)

The context here is a hybrid of American democracy and Roman Catholicism.

Although the context of American Catholicism may lead to inspiring rhetoric, as indicated by VOTF President Jim Post's speech (above), it leads VOTF into a paradoxical position. By contextualizing the clergy abuse crisis and its management in a democratic ideal of Catholicism, VOTF essentially promotes a protestant understanding which clashes fundamentally with the basic identity and organizing principles of Catholicism. In fact, it is VOTF's emphasis on democratizing Catholic structures that leads the hierarchy to debate VOTF's identity as a Catholic organization. Thus, in the eyes of the hierarchy, contextualizing the crisis in democratic traditions trumps any reference to a Catholic context.

## **SNAP**

For SNAP, the context for the crisis is comprised of support groups (i.e., SNAP), law enforcement, and the court system. SNAP portrays these contexts as feeding into one another. Victim/survivors come forward to support groups, and in so doing gain the confidence to report their abuse to those in law enforcement and the legal arena, as the following quotes illustrate.

Leaders of a support group for clergy molestation victims are urging "anyone who experienced, witnessed or suspected abuse by Paul Shanley" to come forward to law enforcement. (SNAP, 2005, January 5a)

...we urge you to finally come clean about Poole's abuse and church officials' cover-ups - and urge other victims of Poole to come forward, get help and contact criminal authorities. That's when real healing can take place. (Clohessy letter to Fr. Whitney; SNAP, 2005, April 6)

"We hope the outcome of this trial will encourage others who are still suffering in shame, silence and self-blame to come forward, report to police, get therapy, and seek justice in the courts." (Clohessy; SNAP, 2005, March 24)

We hope that this ruling will encourage victims of abuse to speak up, get help and report their abuse to criminal authorities. ... We in SNAP believe that children are safer thanks to the many brave survivors like Erin Brady, who have come forward, reported abuse and exposed their alleged abusers. More importantly, we hope that Erin Brady will be validated too knowing that she has a right to seek justice in the courts for these alleged crimes and expect to find support and comfort by meeting with other survivors of clergy sexual abuse in SNAP. (Grant; SNAP, 2005, April 19)

SNAP consistently positions successful crisis management within a context of law enforcement, legal structures, and support groups. It also problematizes the USCCB's managerial context, at times setting the two contexts in tension:

It's real progress when sex crimes are handled by independent law enforcement professionals, instead of biased, untrained church officials. It's real progress when abuse victims can seek justice in the open, time-tested American court system, instead of in the secretive, untested internal church proceedings. (Blaine; SNAP, 2005, February 17)

Bishops have devised the rules of play, hired the umpires, chosen the players, and in about an hour, will declare that they're winning. ... They wrote the Charter, they hired their own so-called watchdogs, they decide who gets interviewed and who gets heard. ... This is crucial - prior to January 2002, each bishop was in charge of handling sex abuse in his diocese. Today, each bishop essentially still is. (SNAP, 2005, February 18)

SNAP also points out where the context of management has failed:

"This is at least the second time Cardinal George has clearly violated the US bishops' guidelines on abuse" said Clohessy. "His flock deserves some straight answers, and Fr. Yakaitis' victims deserve a strong public apology." (SNAP, 2005, February 8)

Time and time again since Dallas, bishops have moved backwards toward the failed policies of the past, not forwards toward real prevention in the future. (Blaine; SNAP, 2005, June 16)

Clearly, what the USCCB positions as a solution, SNAP positions as an ongoing problem. From this perspective, both the hierarchy's historical and current management have failed.



A fascinating picture emerges in a comparative reading of the discursive contexts for this crisis. The USCCB situates the crisis and its resolution within the Church, particularly within hierarchical control. VOTF agrees with Church as context, but argues for a lay-influenced, participative Church. This shift is rejected by the hierarchy, putting the two organizations at an impasse for the first several years of the crisis. In order to get past this deadlock, VOTF repeatedly clarifies its intent to strengthen the structure of the Church rather than challenge it. In so doing, VOTF and the USCCB appear to step toward a more similar (Church) context for crisis management.

In contrast, SNAP acknowledges the context of Church (i.e., hierarchical control) only to problematize it. SNAP alone contextualizes crisis management in an arena comprised of support groups, law enforcement, and the court system. Interestingly, SNAP is critical of the judicial system, even while promoting it. On the other hand, SNAP offers no criticisms or cautions about support groups or law enforcement. This being the case, it is interesting to note that the USCCB draws heavily on Catholic members of the law enforcement and legal communities to staff its crisis-specific committees, boards, and offices. It seems, then, that although SNAP and the USCCB disagree on contextualizing the case in the Church, and although they debate one another's tactics in the legal arena, they share some degree of respect for law enforcement and legal entities. This may indicate an area of common sense-making among these two stakeholder organizations.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has offered three ways in which the context of a crisis may be analyzed from a dialogical perspective. By assessing the discursive presence of each stakeholder organization across time, it is possible to track how a variety of stakeholders communicatively engage the crisis. This is an essential orienting mechanism, especially in the case of a crisis being addressed through web posted press statements and releases. In the clergy abuse crisis, it appears that the USCCB dominates the floor initially, but relinquishes it once it deems the crisis ‘resolved.’ This opens the door for SNAP, a silent presence at the beginning of this chapter of the clergy abuse crisis, to become a gradually predominant voice on the crisis. Even a simple assessment of VOTF’s discursive presence in the crisis indicates its relatively low-power position in the crisis. It appears on the scene in response to the crisis, spends its early PR on establishing its identity, and relinquishes its lead in the larger crisis discourse nearly as soon as it gains it. Tracing the discursive presence of each stakeholder organization sets up an essential context for a more particular analysis of how language is used in this case.

By sifting each organization’s use of dialogic terms with its meta-communication about dialogic processes, it is possible to identify politicized uses of dialogic terms. This serves as a revealing backdrop for a more specific assessment of the dialogical interactivity in each stakeholder’s crisis communication, as the next chapter will show. At this point, it is clear from VOTF and SNAP’s response to the USCCB’s discourse that, although the latter attempts to cultivate a dialogical image, it patently fails to convince. Both VOTF and SNAP mark a gap between the USCCB’s assertions of

dialogicality and its monological communication. The inherent monologicality of the bishops' PR discourse is underscored by their non-responsive communication, their decreasing discursive presence across time, and their focus on managerial control. What becomes clear in a dialogical assessment is that the USCCB's 'politically savvy' use of dialogical terms actually marks its duplicity. Ironically, the bishops' attempt to cultivate a dialogical image serves to mark its lack of dialogicality.

On one hand, although the bishops' monologic orientation blinds them to the holes in their PR, their position of power may insulate them from any significant ramifications of this lack of self-awareness. On the other hand, by contextualizing the crisis as either an internal issue over which they ought to have (nearly) exclusive authority or an inevitable social ill, the hierarchy blinds itself to important alternative contexts. For example, in the first few years of the crisis, the hierarchy found itself in a reactive position in the media and legal arenas. This occurred because Church leaders refused to consider the possibility that what it deemed an internal matter could be forced into an external context. Not only did this presumption prove wrong, but it led the bishops to take actions that were patently offensive. Thus, the leadership has made itself vulnerable by believing its own contextualization.

By identifying and comparing the discursive context each organization constructs for the crisis, it is possible to delineate points at which stakeholders share or contest one another's understanding of the crisis and possible 'solutions.' Where this points to fundamental tensions among organization's understandings of the crisis, it indicates likely points of intractability and frustration. However, where it points to basic

agreements among contexts, it indicates pathways for the productively managing the crisis. What emerges from the current analysis is an indication of two potential areas of overlap among the stakeholder organizations. Although they disagree on the definition of *Church*, both the USCCB and VOTF situate the crisis within that organization's jurisdiction. Their inability to interact productively largely centers on differing definitions of the Church as an organization. Then, despite significant differences between how the USCCB and SNAP contextualize the crisis, they do seem to have a mutual respect for the law enforcement. For anyone interested in generating dialogue among stakeholder groups, a similar analysis might reveal both what is limiting dialogue and where it could be productively rerouted.

By mapping how each stakeholder organization manages its verbal presence across the crisis, frames the concept of dialogue, and contextualizes the crisis, this chapter has sketched a broad context for the clergy abuse crisis. The key stakeholders are more or less present across time, evidence key alternate between actual and political uses of dialogic terms and practices, and position the crisis in a variety of contexts. At a broad level, one might paint this crisis as a situation in which the source organization shows an early predominance but quickly recedes, evinces a transparently politicized application of dialogic terms, and positions the crisis as both a well-managed internal problem and an inevitable social ill. In contrast to this are VOTF and SNAP. VOTF is a relatively consistent, yet non-dominant presence in the crisis; in contrast, SNAP turns its late debut in the crisis discourse into a dominant discursive presence. Both organizations points out the USCCB's patently non-dialogic communication, while submitting (to a greater or

lesser degree) to a Catholic Discourse. Whereas VOTF affirms the hierarchy's contextualization of the crisis within the Church, SNAP shares the USCCB's respect for the law enforcement as a context for this crisis. The next chapter fills in this broad outline with a more particular analysis of the discursive interactivity of stakeholder organizations.

## CHAPTER VII

### ANALYSIS II: INTERACTIVITY

The previous chapter took a broad perspective of the crisis communication produced by three key stakeholder organizations in the clergy abuse case. First it tracked each organization's discursive presence in the crisis across time, then it mapped each stakeholder's ideological orientations to dialogic communication, and concluded with an assessment of how each organization contextualized the crisis. Since the current study applies a dialogical lens to crisis communication produced by disparate organizations across time and space, such a review is essential in order to draw the data into a shared frame. The assumption is not that these organizations are in dialogue in a traditional sense, but that their discourse can be assessed by a dialogic framework.

Monitoring the organizations' mutual discursive presence in the crisis is an important first step in this process. In this case, it appears that the USCCB predominates early on, taking the opportunity to engage in traditional apologia. By mid-2002, VOTF becomes a consistent voice, first establishing its identity, then responding to the USCCB's rhetoric and actions. In time, VOTF's presence plateaus, and SNAP's spikes. It seems that VOTF settles into organizational status quo, while SNAP continues to take the lead in issue management in the public arena. As the USCCB quietly fades to the background, SNAP takes the floor, becoming a strong offensive voice in the crisis. (Note: The use of *offense/offensive* and *defense/defensive* in this chapter parallel their use on sports teams.) This analysis reveals how the selected organizations make their discursive presence felt across the period studied.

The second step presented in the previous chapter set each organization's use of dialogic terminology as a background for its actual discursive practice. In this way, it is possible to distinguish between politicized applications of dialogic terms and actual attempts to either enact or constrain dialogic communication. Here, it begins to be clear how much the stakeholder organizations reflect on the communicative practices of the source organization. Both VOTF and SNAP emphasize the hierarchy's politicized use of dialogic terms and its tendency to restrict access to dialogic practices.

The third analysis in the previous chapter painted a complex picture of the contexts each organization uses to make sense of the crisis. Although the USCCB and VOTF both contextualize the crisis within the Church, their understanding of 'church' differs. One relies on a hierarchically controlled church, while the other argues for a participative church structure. VOTF is required to 'clarify' its position on structural change and lay involvement in order to be acknowledged by members of the hierarchy. SNAP contests Church as context, instead situating the crisis in what it portrays as overlapping arenas of support group, law enforcement, and legal system. There is a definite tension over how the crisis of clergy sexual abuse is contextualized.

These broad analyses set the stage for a more particular analysis of the crisis discourse. Although it is impractical to apply a traditional micro-level discourse analysis to as large a data set as the current one (and arguably inappropriate for a mediated communication situation), it is possible to adapt such an analysis to track the discursive strategies each organization uses to manage the interactivity of crisis communication. To do this, the current study adapts Linell's (1998) discourse analytic approach.

In his work on dialogue and dialogicality (i.e., an epistemological orientation focusing on contextualized interactions), Linell specifies a number of ways in which dialogue functions within discourse (p. 7). Although his framework is directed toward traditional face-to-face dialogues and foregrounds the collaborative aspects of dialogue, it is a productive starting place for the current study. The following three analyses, adapted from Linell's framework (1998, pp. 169-171), are arguably the most salient of his tools to a dialogical assessment of crisis communication. Keeping in mind the units of analysis offered by Linell, this chapter looks at individual press releases/statements and topics.

First, this chapter addresses initiative/response patterns, comparing this to the general offensive/defensive orientation inherent in crisis communication. Second, it assesses the way in which topics are pitched, carried, and/or dropped among the three stakeholder organizations. Third, it looks at how the selected stakeholders manage power by discursively constructing one another's participation in the crisis. Each of these draws on a traditional element of dialogicality in order to illuminate some aspect of crisis communication.

### **Tracking Initiative/Response Patterns**

One aspect of dialogicality that Linell addresses is a comparative analysis of initiatives to responses. On one hand, looking for a direct initiative/response sequence is problematic when the communication flows along an asynchronous, virtual channel (i.e., the Internet), as it does in the current dataset. On the other hand, regardless of the channel that carries it, crisis communication emerges in response to real-time events.



This being the case, there are points at which it is possible to determine whether a press release/statement is an initiative or response. In fact, given the nature of VOTF and SNAP as organizations that exist in response to the clergy abuse crisis, much of their communication is overtly responsive to the rhetoric and actions of the USCCB. Further, there may be strategic power in ‘punctuating’ the discourse in particular ways in order to shift the blame or craft a particular version of the crisis narrative.

Although it must be applied carefully to web-based PR due to its nature as asynchronous rather than temporally linear communication, an initiative/response analysis is especially apropos to crisis communication, given the tradition of conceptualizing crisis rhetoric as attack/defense sequences. Assumptions about initiative/response are implicit in any delineation of a press release/statement as either offensive or defensive. Thus, one way to adapt Linell’s initiative/response assessment to crisis communication is to compare initiative/response patterns to defensive/offensive orientations in the discourse. In doing this, the current study looks for ways in which each organization uses offensive-initiatives (i.e., being the first to levy an attack), offensive-responses (i.e., responding to another’s discourse with an attack), defensive-initiatives (i.e., using a preemptive defense), and defensive-responses (i.e., responding defensively to an attack). Defensive-responses (c.f., *apologia*) and offensive-initiatives (c.f., *attack*) are perhaps more common than are offense-responses (c.f., *kategoria* *apologia*) and defensive-initiatives (c.f., *stealing thunder*). Each, however, appears in the current dataset, as the following paragraphs show.

## USCCB

Even though it would make sense that the discourse of an organization in the defensive position would be marked by responses (given the responsive nature of a defense), this does not play out in the current case. In fact, the opposite is true. Here, the discourse of the ‘source’ organization, the USCCB, is comprised predominantly of what appear to be proactive initiatives. This is the case as it announces meetings, rolls out new policies, marks organizational changes, and narrates its managerial strategies. Although the USCCB’s crisis communication comes from an essentially defensive orientation in the overall crisis situation, its language is comprised of initiatives. Its discourse, then, is comprised of defensive-initiatives, marked by such words as *announced*, *resolved*, *named*, and *appointed*. Although these strategic actions are taken in response to the larger crisis situation, they are communicated in a proactive, declarative way. Typical examples follow.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) announced today that the convened membership of the conference ... approved a new Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. (USCCB, 2002, June 15)

Two hundred ten priest canon lawyers received training in the canonical procedures for implementing the Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), in conjunction with The Catholic University of America (CUA), provided the training. (USCCB, 2003, February 27)

Note the declarative tone in these quotes. It is as if the USCCB is rolling out a new policy and training its ‘priest canon lawyers’ of its own accord. The larger context of crisis slips away in such language, the proactive tone almost outweighing the defensive stance of the organization. Similar language permeates the USCCB’s press releases. The

predominance of defensive-initiative discourse may be indicative of the hierarchy's power in the crisis. It clearly positions the USCCB as proactive and in control. Note that the USCCB focused one of its earliest press releases on "two decades of efforts by the nation's Catholic bishops to address the problem of sex abuse in the Church and to assist those who have been affected by it" (USCCB, 2002, February 15).

One of the few cases in which the USCCB's discourse is defensive-responsive comes in the face of a critique of a particular Vatican document. This 1962 document, unearthed in 2003, was criticized as implicating the hierarchy in a strategy of cover-up. The USCCB responded in the following way:

Crimen sollicitationis ... issued March 16, 1962, is being portrayed by some in and outside the media as a "smoking gun" allegedly proving that there was a "ground plan" for "covering up" the crime of sexual abuse of minors by clerics.

The essential point in response to those making this claim is that they are taking the document entirely out of context and therefore distorting it completely. ... To contend that the document is intended to create a "chilling effect" on reporting civil crimes is to attribute to it an intention it simply never had. ... To suggest that it was intended as a "ground plan" for handling these matters in the United States (or in any particular jurisdiction) is ludicrous. ...

The 1962 document is also being treated as evidence of the fact that the "Church knew there was a problem." As already indicated, both the 1917 and the 1983 Codes of Canon Law publicly recognized the sexual abuse of minors by clerics as a serious crime which is to be punished with a serious penalty. The gravity of such sexual abuse is based on the Decalogue. (USCCB, 2003, August 7)

Here, the defensive orientation of the hierarchy is underscored by its direct response to external (i.e., public) criticism. There are only a handful of press releases, though, in four years' time, that take a defensive-responsive tone. A more typical response is silence or nonresponsiveness. This is called out specifically in the following SNAP press release about the lack of response received from a bishop.

Mahony did not respond to SNAP's letter.... SNAP is troubled by Mahony's silence and non-responsiveness to their request.

"Surely, the Cardinal can do SOMETHING.... We are convinced that he can find a way to help these men and other victims", says Manny Vega, SNAP Leader.

Leaders of SNAP are writing Mahony yet again, urging him to take a responsible role to stop the culture of intimidation in the church. (SNAP, 2004, December 22)

(Other evidence of their general nonresponsiveness comes from Governor Keating's angry comments that they refused to cooperate with the NRB's request for the disclosure of information, bishops' refusal to open documents or publish the names of the accused, or frequent descriptions of the hierarchy as having a 'culture of secrecy'.)

By consistently applying defensive-initiative language (and largely avoiding responsive language), the USCCB strategically downplays the crisis situation and frames its actions as positive and proactive.

## **VOTF**

VOTF is situated in an interesting position in the crisis, being disassociated by the organization with which it identifies. Although in seeking to "shape structural change within the Church" (one of its organizational goals), VOTF orients itself as an offensive force in the crisis, VOTF's struggle to justify its existence in the Church's eyes puts VOTF on the defensive. This defensive orientation is clear in the following quote.

Voice of the Faithful is profoundly concerned by the recent bannings from church property.... It is our responsibility to point out that the very parishioners who have been erroneously labeled as "anti-Church and ultimately, anti-Catholic" are the same mainstream Catholics welcomed to Sunday morning Mass and encouraged to financially support the very properties from which they have been banned. ...

We must also remind our bishops that as an association of Catholic laity, Voice of the Faithful has formed properly under the meaning of Canon 215, which states, “The Christian faithful are at liberty freely to found and to govern associations for charitable and religious purposes or for the promotion of the Christian vocation in the world; they are free to hold meetings to pursue these purposes in common.” In addition, the teachings of Vatican II clearly articulate the right — and even the obligation — of laypersons to form associations and make their voices heard on matters concerning the good of the Church. (VOTF, 2002, October 11)

Clearly, VOTF is on the defensive here, using defensive-responsive language. This is typical of VOTF’s press releases about the bannings.

Although VOTF is on the defensive about its identity as a legitimate Catholic organization, it attempts to be an offensive force on other issues in the crisis (e.g., naming systemic complicity). Even its offensive discourse, however, is couched in responsive terms. By situating itself as responsive to the hierarchy, VOTF undermines the power of its offensive strategy. That is, in responding to the hierarchy’s actions so faithfully (albeit critically), VOTF marks itself as a follower. Its discourse is marked by passive, low power words like *call on*, *has learned*, and *seeks*. Its identity as “an organization ... formed in response to the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church” is underscored by its consistent use of responsive discourse (be that offensive or defensive), as the following quote shows.

Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) announced today that the Archdiocese of Boston Policies and procedures for the Protection of Children are welcome, if overdue. The long delay in issuing these policies is regrettable, but these provisions can move the Archdiocese of Boston in the right direction if they are implemented aggressively. ...

Luise Dittrich, a VOTF co-founding member and spokesperson, commented on Bishop Lennon's letter, "If Bishop Lennon meant what he wrote about compassion, a pastoral response, and a commitment to reconciliation and healing, the Archdiocese will move immediately to settle the outstanding lawsuits with

survivors, and will move to restore unity to the Archdiocese by ending the banning of Voice of the Faithful from Church property. These divisive, non-pastoral stances continue to erode trust in the moral voice of this Archdiocese." (VOTF, 2003, May 30)

This is just one example in which VOTF responds in a blow-by-blow fashion to the USCCB's actions. Throughout the crisis, VOTF adopts responsive discourse both to defend its identity and to critique the hierarchy. This deferential critique is in accord with VOTF's position as an internal dissent organization. Further, the reliance on responsive language for both offense and defense marks VOTF's submission to the hierarchy. Indeed, this may be one reason VOTF's discursive presence in the crisis plateaus in time.

## **SNAP**

SNAP uses more initiatives in its discourse than VOTF does, and largely relies on an offensive orientation in its communication. Interestingly, where SNAP does respond, it often responds to incriminating behaviors of the hierarchy rather than to the hierarchy's discourse. The following quote gives an example of SNAP's offense-response to behaviors of the hierarchy.

The resignation of Bishop Dupre after allegations of abuse left a gaping hole in the Diocese of Springfield. The problems in Springfield reflect decades of mismanagement, cover up, protection of perpetrator priests and their criminal behavior, and possible destruction of diocesan documents. Let us not be naive in assuming that this could be rectified quickly by the right bishop. The problems in the diocese reflect the actions of its former leader, Bishop Thomas Dupre, but also his inner circle. The diocese was not the domain of one corrupt man, and cannot be "cleaned up quickly" by one honest man. (SNAP, 2004, March 9)

In this quote, SNAP leverages its response to Bishop Dupre's resignation as an opportunity to point out the corruption permeating the Springfield Diocese. This is

clearly an offense-response based on the behavior rather than the PR or policies of the hierarchy.

In another example, SNAP turns its response to a cardinal's legal tactics into an attack on the hierarchy:

Several times, Maida has sought to have civil sex abuse lawsuits against Detroit area priests tossed out because of the statute of limitations. SNAP maintains that church officials should not "hide behind" a "restriction that encourages abusers and their supervisors to destroy evidence, intimidate witnesses and threaten victims."

"If you insist on fighting men who were raped and sodomized by an abusive priest, at least have the decency to fight fair, and not fight dirty," said Clohessy. "Fight on the merits, not on technicalities and loopholes like the archaic and dangerously restrictive statute of limitations." (SNAP, 2005, January 5b)

This attack on a representative of the hierarchy clearly illustrates SNAP's strategic use of offense-responses. Where VOTF uses responses to defend itself against the hierarchy, SNAP uses responses to attack the hierarchy, at times pointing out discrepancies between the church's rhetoric and its actions (as noted in the section on politicized uses of dialogue terms).

Across time, SNAP levies an increasingly forceful stream of offense-initiatives on a multitude of issues (see Table 7). This approach accords with SNAP's identity as an activist organization, and exemplifies what one might think of as a typically offensive orientation. Initiating attacks against the source organization is a key function in any crisis. By naming a variety of issues, SNAP broadens the possible scope of the crisis. However, where these issues are not engaged by other stakeholders, they are effectively dead-ended. Thus, although the introduction of issues is potentially powerful, it is dependent on some response or engagement by other participants. In this case, many of

the offense-initiatives SNAP presents are not addressed (at least in this venue) by the other organizations. More will be said about the effect this has on the case in the section on (non)topicality.

**Table 7**  
**Sampling of SNAP's Offensive-Initiatives**

- 
- Discloses names of ten Northern California abusers to be named in lawsuits.
  - Comments on the possible 'fraudulent transfer of assets' in the Diocese of Baker, OR.
  - Accuses McChesney (head of OCYP) as lacking understanding of hierarchy's 'game.'
  - Leaflets a perpetrator's neighborhood in St. Louis.
  - Traces the possible transfer of Nevada priest to MO treatment center.
  - Comments on incriminating 1962 Vatican document.
  - Encourages Catholics to bypass bishops' annual appeals.
  - Demands apologies and restorative action from complicit leaders.
  - Exposes abuse cover-up (i.e., 40 cases in which archbishop knew of prior crimes).
  - Urges Bishop of Maine not to interfere with pending (small claims) trial.
  - Urges NY bishop to investigate abuser living in upstate NY.
  - Asks Albany's bishop to investigate abuser living/working locally.
  - Asks Cardinal to 'rein in' parishioners showing support in court for accused CA priest.
  - Asks judge to more strongly enforce probation for convicted OH priest.
  - Urges victims/survivors not to join in Archdiocese of Cincinnati's compensation fund.
  - Notes bishops found in contempt of court for refusing to turn over documents.
  - Calls for bishop accountability; criticize 'fraternal correction.'
  - Names abusers who live in/work around Vatican.
  - Calls on church leaders to disclose names of molesters.
  - Traces abusers working/living in San Francisco Archdiocese.
- 

What emerges from this analysis is a more complex understanding of how stakeholders orient to crisis communication. Rather than simply being on the offense or defense, they are better described by comparing their offensive/defensive orientations to the balance of initiatives/responses in their discourse. Although each organization uses both initiatives and responses, and may alternate from offense to defense as the crisis



unfolds, each seems to exhibit one orientation more than the others. As the preceding paragraphs and quotes indicate, the USCCB seems to favor defensive-initiatives, VOTF to use offensive-responses on crisis issues and defensive-responses on identity, and SNAP to alternate between offensive-initiatives and offensive-responses. (See Table 8.)

**Table 8**  
**Discursive Orientations to Crisis Communication**

	<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>Offensive</b>	SNAP	VOTF & SNAP
<b>Defensive</b>	USCCB	VOTF

These paradoxical discursive orientations have interesting implications for crisis management in the current case. The USCCB offsets the vulnerability of its defensive position with a masterful, proactive tone. VOTF, on the other hand, attempts to counterbalance its responsive (and thus weak) identity with offensive discourse. SNAP shares this offensive-responsive strategy with VOTF, but augments it with a more powerful offensive-initiative discourse. Whereas the offensive-responsive approach does little for VOTF or SNAP, the offensive-initiative approach to PR advances SNAP's issue management goals. When viewed from a dialogical perspective, these discursive orientations reveal how each organization's PR affects the unfolding crisis. To begin with, the USCCB's lack of responsive language (at least in this venue) dead-ends discourse. Then, VOTF's failure to initiate restricts its influence on how the crisis unfolds. Finally, SNAP's alternating use of initiatives and responses positions it as

having the greatest potential dialogically (although this is stymied by the USCCB's non-responsiveness).

This approach to crisis discourse extends the traditional dichotomy between offensive and defensive orientations to a crisis. It shows the strategic power of offense-responses. It also raises the potential that defense-responses may give an organization more credibility than reliance on defense-initiatives does. This has important implications for the communicative construction of any crisis, indicating both potential challenges and strategies in crisis communication.

### **Tracking (Non)Topicality**

Another way to apply Linell's (1998) dialogical framework to crisis communication is by assessing (non)topicality. Linell advocates tracking a dialogue's content by coding focal or nonfocal responses. Focal responses are tied to the main content; nonfocal utterances are not. This implies that the 'main content' of a dialogue may be indicated by the mutual attention of participants to a particular issue. This is adapted to the current dataset by tracking topic that receives attention from all stakeholder organizations, and contrasting that to a series of nontopical press releases/statements. This is a way to map shared attention and non-shared attention to crisis issues; it is also a way to explore the implications of whose issues do or do not become 'main content.'

### **Topicality**

In a face-to-face interaction, a topic is jointly produced across talk-turns, and is one component of dialogic coherence (Linell, 1998, p. 183). Understanding how

stakeholders manage topicality, or ‘sustained matters’ (p. 182) in mediated communication is important to foregrounding the dialogicality of the clergy abuse crisis. Although this foregrounds points of shared focus and dialogic coherence, it in no way assumes that stakeholder organizations treat a topic in similar ways. It requires identifying a point of focus shared by all stakeholders (much like a thread in an online discussion), while acknowledging differential ways in which that topic is managed by each stakeholder organization.

Perhaps the most obvious topic or thread in the clergy abuse crisis is the creation of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. This document may be considered the core of the USCCB’s policy response to the crisis. The creation of this document spanned several months and garnered attention from all stakeholder organizations. It was the subject of direct and indirect communication from the release of the first draft in June 2002 through the end of the data collection period. No doubt it continues to surface in the ongoing discourse, since it is held by all stakeholder organizations as one (albeit imperfect) standard for evaluating the USCCB’s ongoing crisis management. The contested construction of this document is traced in brief here as an example of (contested) topicality.

The original draft created by the USCCB’s Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse was announced publicly prior to the USCCB’s General Meeting in June 2002. It was detailed in a lengthy USCCB press release prior to the bishops’ June General Meeting. This draft was approved by a vote of 239 to 13 by the bishops. The USCCB described the Charter as:

... the definitive response of the U.S. bishops to the laity's, the clergy's, and the public's concern over the issue of sexual abuse of minors by clergy. (USCCB, 2002, June 15)

It was described further by then USCCB President Bishop Gregory as “an unprecedented milestone” in four ways:

“First, the bishops have resolved to create national standards and policies for dealing with the devastating pain and sorrow of abuse victims. Second, we have established national standards and processes for protecting all children in the future. Third, we have committed to and established national processes for consistently and vigilantly dealing with clergy abusers - with no tolerance for any abuse and for barring from the ministry all abusers. Finally, we are committing dioceses and the national organization of the conference to greater involvement of the laity in all these new procedures.” (USCCB, 2002, June 15)

This approved draft (and accompanying ‘Essential Norms’) was sent to the Vatican for ‘recognitio’ or official recognition. Upon receipt of the draft, the Pope called for a Mixed Commission (comprised of four Vatican officials and four U.S. bishops) to revise the document. The naming of a committee empowered to revise the Charter called out a response from VOTF that was initially uncertain, yet positive:

VOTF has received reports that the Vatican has rejected some elements of the U.S. Catholic Church’s new sex abuse policy. Early information indicates that Vatican objections concern elements of the proposed policy that would violate the individual rights of accused clerics. ... VOTF stresses that the proposed Charter must protect the rights of accused priests as well as the rights of victims. ...

The Vatican’s decision seems likely to place more pressure on individual American Bishops to work with the laity to establish an effective system of protection. ... VOTF stands ready to work with bishops, priests, survivors, and the laity to shape and implement the best possible protection policy. (VOTF, 2002, October 17)

Within 24 hours, VOTF’s response turned negative:

VOTF today expressed its deep regret regarding the Vatican's decision to reject the U.S. Roman Catholic Church's new sexual abuse policy. ... “It is deeply

troubling that the Vatican has concluded that the judgment of those closest to the problem and to the 64 million members of the U.S. Catholic community is so severely flawed," said Jim Post, president, Voice of the Faithful. (VOTF, 2002, October 18)

The shift seems to mark VOTF's further reflection on the implications of the changes.

Whereas VOTF first read them as stimulating bishop-lay collaboration, they quickly saw them as discounting the bishops' assessment of the situation. Regardless of VOTF's reaction, a revised document was quickly produced by the Mixed Commission, and just as quickly approved at the USCCB's November 2002 General Meeting. Despite the document's general approval within the USCCB, its increased focus on protecting the accused and decreased role for the laity did not meet with support outside of the USCCB, as the following quotes indicate.

Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) expressed its deep concern regarding ... news of the Vatican's decision to re-apply a 10-year statute of limitations on sexual abuse accusations against priests in an apparent retreat from aspects of the U.S. Catholic bishops' "zero tolerance" stance proposed in the Dallas Charter. (VOTF, 2002, November 1)

Voice of the Faithful ... today addressed the limitations contained within the Vatican's revised *Charter*.... "This current revision significantly reduces the laity's role by limiting us to simply 'advising the bishop in his assessment of allegations of sexual abuse of minors...' rather than actively participating in the 'assessment of allegations' as outlined in the June Charter." (VOTF, 2002, November 10)

"VOTF supports the bishops in honoring their moral commitment made in Dallas, TX and urges their firm commitment to bridge the gap between the pastoral intent of the Charter and the diminished administrative and judicial guidelines of the [Vatican approved] Norms. ...." said Steve Krueger. (VOTF, 2002, November 13)

The USCCB responded to such criticisms by writing:

"Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Clergy or Other Church Personnel, which the USCCB sent

to the Holy See for its recognitio, substantially confirms the decisions made at the June general meeting of the U.S. Catholic Bishops.

"Contrary to many news reports, the Holy See did not reject or even 'soften' this work.... In elaborating the canonical procedures to be used in dealing with allegations of sexual abuse of minors, the Holy See has shown a legitimate concern for the rights of the accused while fully supporting the obligation of the bishops, in the governance of their dioceses, to ensure these rights and the right of the faithful to be protected" (Bishop Gregory; USCCB, 2002, November 1)

The final draft of the Charter was then sent back to the Vatican, where it received a few minor edits and a quick 'recognitio' by the Vatican. At this point, SNAP weighed in, criticizing the approved Charter and Norms:

"The Vatican has okayed a very flawed document that has already been implemented sporadically across the country. It will mean a diminished role for Catholic lay people as well as greater secrecy, and less reporting to law enforcement officials when abuse allegation arise within the church. Recent priest sex abuse cases in Michigan, New Jersey and Ohio, are proof of the failure of this policy." (Vercelotti; SNAP, 2002, December 16)

Despite all the attention the creation of the Charter (and Norms) garnered, its recognition was provisional, meaning that it would come up for review within two years of its 'recognitio.' The ongoing construction of this document leaves this as an open thread in the larger crisis discourse. Indeed, each of the stakeholder organizations continues to address issues related to the Charter through the end of the time studied. This shows an interesting contrast to typical organizational strategy of quick closure in crisis management. Thus, as a point of common attention spanning many press releases/statements across time, the construction of the Charter is easily defined as a topic in the crisis discourse. However, it is important to note that it marks dialogic coherence as much through its consistent contestation as it does through its consistent

presence in the discourse. It is also important to note that the creation of the Charter is merely one of several possible examples of a topic addressed in the current case.

### **Nontopicality**

A dialogical perspective must be as attuned to non-topicality as it is topicality. The key here is identifying threads that are introduced by one stakeholder organization without being taken up by others. This may be indicated by what Linell (1998) calls competing communicative projects. According to Linell, in addressing dialogue as a struggle to achieve intersubjectivity or discursive power (rather than coherence), it is essential to address the emergence of competing communicative projects (p. 89). Where the assessment of focality draws attention to mutual (if contested) topics, the assessment of competing communicative projects draws attention to the plurality of topics introduced in a speech event.

In the current case, each stakeholder organization introduces potential topics that are ignored by the others. One of the few dropped threads to come from the hierarchy is its attempt to broaden the scope of the crisis to the societal dilemma of child sexual abuse. Especially in the early months of the crisis, the USCCB's discourse refers to the abuse of children "in society."

"The attention to this issue also gives me the opportunity to renew the promise of our bishops that we will continue to take all the steps necessary to protect our youth from this kind of abuse in society and in the Church," he said. (Bishop Gregory; USCCB, 2002, February 19)

The draft Charter also contains a proposal that the USCCB "cooperate with other churches, institutions of learning, and other interested organizations in conducting a major research study" about sexual abuse of children and young people in our society. (USCCB, 2002, June 4)

However, rather than responding to the USCCB's attempt to broaden the focus to the issue of child sexual abuse in society, both VOTF and SNAP keep their discourse trained on the more specific issue of *clergy* sexual abuse.

VOTF has a number of dropped threads throughout the discourse, many of which come from its initial quest to gain organizational legitimacy in the eyes of the hierarchy. The willing submission of VOTF to the organizational church affects how VOTF's competing communicative projects play out in the larger discourse. That is, the discursive enactment of what might be described as a childish or adolescent role in the quest for organizational legitimation and crisis management undermines VOTF's goals of democratizing the church and challenging the infantilization of the laity. This being the case, it is not surprising that many of VOTF's legitimacy-oriented topic pitches (although perhaps addressed by the hierarchy in other venues) are not addressed in USCCB press releases.

VOTF also introduces threads about its organizational activities and growth which are not picked up by either the USCCB or SNAP. For example:

Voice of the Faithful ... today announced the opening of its global headquarters. (VOTF, 2002, August 1b)

In an open letter to Voice of the Faithful membership, President Jim Post signaled the group's intention to build "an informed, credible and effective voice" for lay Catholics by announcing the retention of Ladislav Orsy, S.J. as the group's professional outside consultant in canon law and related matters. (VOTF, n.d., "Voice of the Faithful Names")

Voice of the Faithful ... today announced the results of the VOTF Winchester Parish Affiliate's survey of 30 Catholic Priests from the Archdiocese of Boston. ... Winchester-area VOTF member and a co-author of the priest survey Christina Hurley, admits that the results are not "all-inclusive opinions" from Boston's



clergy however, the survey does reveal an overlooked view into the daily pain of priests faithfully serving the Catholic Church. (VOTF, 2003, February 19)

None of these issues or events is addressed in the PR of the USCCB or of SNAP. Such unaddressed threads serve to narrate VOTF's life-cycle without engaging the other key stakeholders.

Similarly, one of the 'competing communicative projects' SNAP offers is a tracing of its organizational history and actions. For example:

The nation's largest support group for clergy molestation victims grew "like wild fire" last year and now has 44 active monthly support groups meeting across the country. ... (SNAP) started 2002 with less than 3,000 members and 9 active local chapters. The organization now has more than 4,500 members in virtually every state, and monthly support group meetings in 44 cities. ... SNAP began 2002 with groups that met sporadically became re-invigorated and started to meet more regularly. (SNAP, 2003, February 6)

This excerpt, representative of SNAP's organizational narration, is not surprisingly ignored by the USCCB and VOTF.

More frequently than tracking its actions, SNAP's competing communicative projects emerge from the legal arena or its detailed tracking of global Church (mis)management. For example:

... (SNAP)...today sent a letter to ... Bishop Donald Wuerl urging him to provide SNAP free, full-page advertising space in the Diocesan newspaper.... This request comes on the heels of Wuerl's purchase and production of a half-hour television commercial.... Wuerl, who hosted the commercial, discussed the clergy abuse crisis with a prominent church defense lawyer. SNAP calls the program "one-sided, shameless public relations" and criticized Wuerl for not including any victims on the show. (SNAP, 2004, March 5)

This quote is representative of SNAP's attempts to spotlight (particularly unfavorable) actions of the hierarchy. This excerpt serves a dual purpose, marking both the actions of a particular bishop and SNAP's attempt to engage the bishop about the situation. This

strategic topic pitch, however, is met by an equally strategic non-response from the USCCB's PR.

SNAP's press releases and statements are rife with similar topic pitches which are left unaddressed by the USCCB or VOTF. (For example, SNAP alone notes an abuser who says mass in Alaska, Alaskan church leaders who identify a St. Louis priest as abuser, and a St. Louis Catholic center that houses an abuser within 20 miles of his former victim.) A comparison of SNAP and VOTF's PR indicates that each organization selectively notes those actions of the hierarchy that are particularly salient to that organization. The effect, when taken together, is a laundry list of disparate notations about the hierarchy which are dropped in the larger crisis discourse. This raises the question of whether those topic pitches are taken up by other stakeholders (e.g., media and laity). It also raises the question of whether it is more strategic for stakeholders to introduce competing communicative projects or to collaborate on turning one another's topic pitches into topics. (Chapter VIII addresses the latter strategy.)

These questions aside, it is important to trace one of the most pervasive competing communicative projects in SNAP's PR: a focus on the legal/juridical treatment of the crisis. In its press releases and statements, SNAP gives a running commentary on legal aspects of case, almost like a sports announcer giving a play-by-play. In 2004 alone, SNAP's PR draws attention to:

- A relevant report by the Maine Attorney General,
- Allegations against and criminal investigation of a Massachusetts bishop,
- Legal restrictions in Wisconsin against prosecuting church leaders,

- What victim/survivors want out of a mediation process in Milwaukee,
- The freeing of convicted sex offender in St. Louis,
- Bishop Gregory's use of 'hardball legal tactics' against victim/survivors,
- Bishops being found in contempt of court for refusing to turn over documents,
- A former Brooklyn priest given a life sentence,
- Sentencing/plea agreement of a Cincinnati priest,
- The release of document in a Massachusetts case,
- A Missouri ruling opening the door for delayed prosecution of child molesters,
- Two former seminarians settling a civil suit against their abuser (Missouri),
- A Stigmatine priest's guilty plea,
- The lifting of a Nevada priest's probation,
- The dismissal of a suit against the Rochester, NY diocese,
- The arrest of a Wisconsin abuser,
- A priest who loses his slander suit against his accuser (Tulsa),
- 14 victims/survivors who settle Chicago lawsuits,
- Two civil suits settled against the St. Louis Archdiocese and one of its priests,
- The Missouri Supreme Court decision not to hear an appeal by alleged abuser,

- Wisconsin Supreme Court precedent that treats clergy abuse differently from other types of molestation,
- A Michigan court ruling in favor of statute of limitations, and
- The bankruptcy of the Diocese of Spokane.

One could look at each of these topic pitches individually, noting that none of them is addressed in USCCB or VOTF press releases. One could also look at these topic pitches as a single competing communicative project, one which attempts to reframe the crisis within the juridical arena. (Remember from the previous chapter that SNAP positions the crisis within the legal arena.) Either way, SNAP is caught in a double bind as it attempts to expand the crisis in ways that the other organizational stakeholders do not pick up.

So, by narrating its own actions, select actions of the hierarchy, and unfolding events in the legal arena, SNAP attempts to reframe the crisis in strategic ways. The lack of response from the hierarchy is just as strategic, since dropping these topic pitches may decrease the attention and thus credibility they gain in the larger discourse. Non-responsiveness from VOTF seems less strategic, since engaging any one of these topic pitches would turn it into a topic. VOTF's failure to do so dead-ends what could be a strategic reframing of the crisis.

Since each topic pitch mentioned in this section is effectively ignored by the other stakeholder organizations, it remains underdeveloped, and generally is mentioned in a single press release. Although this section does not give an exhaustive review of each organization's dropped threads, it shows that each organization, to varying degrees,

attempts to introduce topics which the others fail to engage. This underscores Linell's (1998) point that, since topics are jointly produced, the best a speaker can do is to pitch a possible new topic (p. 183). If there is no "sequence of contributions bound together by response links," there is no topic (Linell, 1998, p. 183). Although the linearity inherent in Linell's assertion is problematic in a speech event unfolding across space and time via the Internet, its underlying focus on joint construction remains salient.

In this case, it appears that one source of discursive power is that of non-engagement. That is, by failing to acknowledge or respond to another stakeholder's proposed topic, an organization reduces the chance that 'pitch' has of becoming a full-fledged topic. This is particularly evident where the USCCB remains silent on the multitude of legal/juridical topics pitched by SNAP (and periodically by VOTF). The strategic intent of the hierarchy's silence on these issues (at least in this venue), is underscored by its reliance on a 'culture of deference' from the legal/justice system (*The Boston Globe* Investigative Staff, 2002, p. 8) and by its overt resistance to the opening of court documents and depositions once legal action was inevitable (Boston Globe Spotlight Team, 2002). Thus, although the USCCB has been enmeshed in legal battles since *before* the 2002 story broke, this is a topic it strategically fails to engage in the crisis discourse. Despite its passive nature, this strategy of silence has the potential to be a powerful rhetorical tool at the disposal of each organization. (Conversely, taking up another organization's topic pitches gives momentum to the agenda of the first organization.)

As indicated previously, what might be called ‘dropped topic pitches’ are essential to a dialogical understanding of a speech event. Although not taken up by other parties, these pitches may reveal key or strategic issues for a stakeholder. If a given thread is repeatedly introduced by a stakeholder and ignored by others across the crisis, this may indicate a point of resistance, frustration, or intractability. In such a case, the initiating organization may be marking issues that are particularly salient to it (as VOTF and SNAP do when narrating the hierarchy’s actions). Alternately, dropped threads indicate ideas or issues that have little weight across the stakeholder pool. Thus, the USCCB’s attempts to broadening the scope of the crisis to an unavoidable societal ill are not acknowledged by the other stakeholder organizations, perhaps because this would deemphasize the hierarchy’s culpability. Further, although VOTF is intent on gaining organizational legitimacy, the other organizations do not seem to find this central to the crisis. Similarly, the legal arena, so central for SNAP, is downplayed by the USCCB and largely ignored by VOTF. (Note the previous chapter’s discussion of how each stakeholder organization contextualizes the crisis.)

Non-topicality may also indicate the flow of power in a crisis, if one addresses whose topic pitches are picked up and whose dropped in a crisis situation. As per the previous discussion on initiative/response patterns, the USCCB’s PR is carried almost exclusively by initiatives, VOTF’s largely by responses, and SNAP’s by a mixture of initiatives and responses. What emerges is a speech event in which the majority of topics are introduced by the USCCB and SNAP. In time, however, those topics that gain the attention of more than one stakeholder organization (at least in this venue) are generally

those presented by the USCCB. Although VOTF and SNAP work together (as will be shown in the next chapter), VOTF seems more likely to take up the USCCB's threads than SNAP's. Although this serves VOTF's goals for organizational identification, it does not serve its goals for organizational change.

It is not surprising that VOTF and SNAP have more dropped threads than does the USCCB. If the USCCB does not respond to VOTF or SNAP, then the only way they can engage dialogical communication (which they seek, given the USCCB's position of power) is to respond to the topics it pitches. This constrains VOTF and SNAP's discourse, since their primary access to communication with the hierarchy requires them to engage its agenda. In this way, their responsive (although conflictual) orientation actually advances many of the USCCB's topical initiatives. (It is important to note at this point that this study does not address the agenda-setting capacity of uncontrolled media. This is one of many mitigating forces which is downplayed in order to foreground the dialogicality among the selected stakeholders in this crisis).

In sum, a dialogical orientation to communication is premised on the tension between mutual and divergent attention to (potential) topics. Thus, a dialogical assessment of any speech event must address both topics that are attended to (although not necessarily agreed on) by multiple participants and potential topics that are introduced by one participant without being acknowledged or addressed by other participants. A comparison of engaged and dropped topic pitches illuminates the complexity of communicatively constructing a crisis. It also hints at the subject of the next section: the enactment of power and resistance in a crisis situation.

### **Tracking Power**

In his (1989) review of post-structuralism and Foucault, Clegg offers some insights that frame the following exploration of power in the clergy abuse crisis. Important for a dialogical analysis of discourse is Clegg's conceptualization of power as a relational, and thus interactive, phenomenon (p. 207; see also Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006, p. 230). Just as important is the post-structuralist notion that power is "implicated in attempts to fix or uncouple and change particular representational relations of meaning" (pp. 151-2). The key here is a focus on strategies of discursive power, which are marked when an individual or organization's representation of meaning is treated as natural and/or right (p. 152). For Foucault, agency and structure, both keys to power, are constituted discursively (Clegg, 1989, p. 158). In tracing three types of power (disciplinary, bio, and sovereign), Foucault conceptualizes power as a fluid force which always implicates resistance (Clegg, 1989, p. 154). In this line of thought, power is an interactive practice enacted (and resisted) through discourse.

In their (2006) review of organizational power, Clegg, Courpasson, and Phillips concur with Foucault that power can only be known through its effects (p. 230). In order to trace power, then, one must note the techniques which "induce appropriate forms of conduct in those whom they target" (p. 231). It is important to note here that the target may be self or other (p. 231). From Clegg, Courpasson, and Phillips' Foucauldian perspective, "power is always embedded in those forms of rationality with which actors will be held accountable" (p. 234). Here, power is not about access to resources, real interests, or ideology; instead, it is about the discursive construction of knowledge



systems within which individuals construct their identities (p. 234). According to Peltonen and Tikkanen (2005), power is “a question of ongoing and active structuring of the possible field of action of the others – a process that is open to resistance, transformation, and renegotiation” (p. 275; in Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006, p. 240). Inasmuch as fields of action are constituted discursively, discourse constitutes the social structures which, in turn, constrain it (pp. 301-3). According to Clegg, Courpasson, and Phillips, discourse analysis (which informs the current study) is tuned to “(u)ntraveling the complex dynamic between discourse and power” (p. 294). This lends credibility to the following paragraphs which trace the (contested) enactment of power and resistance through each organization’s use of language in a crisis. Further, this analysis follows Foucault and Clegg’s preference for tracing “the possibilities of how anyone is able to exercise power; how the fields or arenas in which power is exercised are structured in such a way that power could be exercised” rather than in who has power (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006, p. 254). In this way, it is possible to open up the analysis beyond traditional conceptualizations of organizationally legitimized authority (e.g., Katz & Kahn, 1966, p. 219-220). Rather than focusing on the influence of one organizational actor over another, a discursive analysis of power traces how organizational actors use language to “make up and interpret the rules as they go along” (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006, p. 255).

One way a dialogical framework illuminates the enactment of power is by comparing *soliciting/obliging* and *non-soliciting/non-obliging* initiatives. According to Linell (1998), the former demand direct responses, while the latter invite, but do not

demand, continuation from listener(s). The dichotomy between directive and invitational discourse indicates how a speaker orients toward power. Ostensibly, an organization that relies on invitational discourse takes a lower-power position than does an organization that relies on directive discourse. This leads to the contention that organizations may use more or less powerful discourse in order to meet their strategic goals. Although one might expect a correlation between an organization's socially legitimized authority and its attempts to discursively enact power, a dialogical assessment of power reveals a more complex picture.

### **USCCB**

Although Linell directs attention to directive and invitational initiatives, the USCCB primarily draws on a third type of initiative: declarative. What results is monological orientation to crisis communication in which 'actual' power is embedded in seemingly neutral discourse. In essence, the USCCB's press releases are a long string of announcements that neither demand, nor invite a response; they simply narrate the USCCB's actions, as the following examples illustrate.

The Administrative Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has put the problem of sexual abuse of minors by clergy on the agenda of the June General Meeting of the full body of Bishops. (USCCB, 2002, March 14)

Belleville Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), announced today the restructuring of the Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse (AHCSA) and its new membership. (USCCB, 2002, September 5)

Safe environment programs to protect children and youth should be in the planning process by June 20 and fully implemented for the 2003-2004 school

year, said Kathleen McChesney, executive director of the U.S. Bishops' Office of Child and Youth Protection. (USCCB, 2003, March 7)

Although each of the organizations makes announcements and statements, the USCCB stands out for not augmenting its reliance on declarative discourse with invitational or directive discourse. What results is a sterilized language that creates an aura of distanced objectivity (what Burke (1961) might call a 'priestly' orientation). Even where the USCCB acknowledges victims/survivors, the laity, or other stakeholder organizations, it generally fails to require a response, as the following statement shows.

We understand that your children are your most precious gift. They are our children as well and we continue to apologize to the victims, and to their parents and their loved ones for this failure in our pastoral responsibilities. ...

The Priesthood is a unique treasure of our Church, and I give you my assurance that we are doing everything to ensure that we have worthy and healthy candidates for the Priesthood and to strengthen the many priests who faithfully fulfill their ministry on behalf of all of us. ...

This is a time for Catholic people bishops, clergy, religious, and laity to resolve to work together to assure the safety of our children. These events serve to remind us all that the cost of preventing these terrible misdeeds in the future is a careful watch that cannot and will not be relaxed. We bishops intend to maintain that watch together with and on behalf of our people. (Bishop Gregory; USCCB, 2002, February 19)

In this statement, Bishop Gregory, then president of the USCCB, addresses the laity without inviting or directing any particular response from them. He simply makes naturalizing, ontological statements about how things are (e.g., "your children are...", "the Priesthood is...", "we are doing everything...", "this is a time to..."). In essence, Gregory is interpreting the crisis for the reader, a powerful move found throughout the

USCCB's PR. This is especially powerful, given the persona Gregory constructed of a leader empathetic to the plight of sexual abuse victims/survivors.

Where the hierarchy does demand a particular response from the laity, (as noted in the section on ideological orientation), it does so through an implicit or indirect directive (e.g., 'now is the time to...', 'let us...', 'now is the time for Christians to...'). More often than not, the USCCB merely states what is, without requesting or requiring a particular response from other stakeholders. One effect of this discursive practice is to imply that those who take alternative positions are either not Christians or traitors to the faith community. The USCCB's discourse is marked by a lack of continuation mechanisms throughout, as the following quote indicates.

"My heart goes out to all who have suffered, and I assure them especially that the bishops are committed to fully implementing the Dallas Charter and will continue to work with the Office of Child and Youth Protection and the National Review Board to reach out to victims and prevent such abuse from occurring in the future." (Bishop Gregory; USCCB, 2004, February 16)

In this quote, Gregory talks *about* victims/survivors, without inviting or demanding any response from them. By drawing on declarative discourse, the USCCB's discourse is primarily monological, albeit empathetic, in orientation. Where it is dialogical, this comes through an indirect, implicit use of directives levied to the laity.

## **VOTF**

As a nascent grassroots organization, and one that is disowned by the organization from which they seek organizational legitimation, VOTF operates from a lower power position in this crisis. This being the case, it is not surprising that VOTF consistently 'calls on' the hierarchy for particular responses. The image that emerges

from VOTF's PR is that of a child calling out to its parent in need. In this way, VOTF uses discourse that is strongly invitational, seeming to offset its powerlessness by calling urgently. However, where it 'calls on' or 'urges' the hierarchy to respond in a particular way, VOTF implicitly affirms the hierarchy's greater power. In the following quotes, note that the discourse is strong, without being directive or demanding. It respectfully urges the hierarchy to respond.

We call on those bishops who have banned us to rescind their bans. And we encourage Bishop Lennon and other bishops to establish common ground with Voice of the Faithful for the good of our beloved Church. (VOTF, 2003, January 6)

We also urge the bishop of every diocese to publicly release all applicable documents associated with allegations of sexual abuse by clergy and other personnel. (VOTF, 2003, February 10)

New Hampshire Voice of the Faithful (NH-VOTF) today called on Bishop John B. McCormack and Auxiliary Bishop Francis J. Christian to resign their positions as bishops of the Diocese of Manchester, NH. (VOTF, 2003, April 6)

We urge Bishop DiMarzio to make the sexual abuse crisis his first priority in Brooklyn. (VOTF, 2003, August 1)

At other times, VOTF takes a more forceful approach. By doing this, the organization positions itself as the hierarchy's equal. This is an unsurprising, if risky, move given the tension between the hierarchy and VOTF over democratizing the Church. Despite the potential for appearing rebellious and thus risking dissociation by the hierarchy, VOTF chooses to use both (strong) invitations and directives, as the following quotes show.

An additional and impartial survivor of sexual abuse by clergy must be appointed to the National Review Board monitoring the compliance of Catholic bishops to new policies for disciplining sexually abusive priests, say leaders of Voice of the Faithful ... Voice of the Faithful has previously called for "vigorous

enforcement" of the bishops' publicly stated commitments. (VOTF, 2002, August 1a)

"This ... underscores the moral imperative for the U.S. bishops to firmly and immediately affirm the 'zero tolerance' policy on their own. ... U.S. bishops can still use discretionary authority – their rough equivalent of 'states' rights' – to implement the intent of the Dallas Charter in their own dioceses, and we strongly call on them to do so." (Steve Krueger; VOTF, 2002, November 1)

Voice of the Faithful is calling on every bishop to release the results of the written report provided to him by the OCYP in its entirety. ... Finally, Voice of the Faithful is calling for the vigorous and effective implementation of educational diocesan programs to protect children and young people. ... Bishops must insist that all dioceses comply with implementation of these programs and must provide the necessary funds and resource to ensure their implementation. (VOTF, 2004, January 6)

As an internal dissent organization, VOTF is in an interesting position. It faces a dilemma of seeking to change the system that constrains it. To circumnavigate this challenge, VOTF either uses strong invitations or dovetails invitations with directives. The intent seems to be to promote its agenda powerfully, yet deferentially. Unfortunately, this renders VOTF largely impotent in the situation. By taking the tone of an adolescent petitioning a parent, VOTF discursively affirms the paternalism inherent in the priest-lay structure. Rather than taking this opportunity to fundamentally challenge the Church's structure or extend lay agency, VOTF discursively positions itself as a respectfully dissenting child. Its conflicted discourse leaves little doubt that filial regard is a higher priority than is substantive (structural) change to this organization. By failing to critique or resist the fundamental alignment between the laity and the leadership, VOTF validates the infantilization of the laity it ostensibly wishes to overturn.

## SNAP

Much like VOTF, SNAP uses both invitations and directives to get the hierarchy to respond. They intersperse ‘calls’ on the hierarchy with direct demands, as the following quotes show.

"The Cardinal needs to decide who runs his archdiocese. When it comes to the sexual abuse of kids, he either has a 'zero tolerance' policy or a 'turn a blind eye' policy. The Cardinal must choose." (Blaine; SNAP, 2004, March 4)

“Please do not allow yet another pedophile to evade justice. This may be the best and only way for child abusers everywhere to understand the extent of the damage done to children and they must be held accountable for their terrible crimes.” (Clohessy; SNAP, 2004, May 20)

A support group for clergy sex abuse victims is asking a Catholic pastor to publicly apologize for not stopping a fellow priest who victimized youngsters. (SNAP, 2004, August, 3)

In addition to noting the combination of directives and invitations, it is important to note one particular way in which SNAP uses its discursive power. Due to its position outside the Church, SNAP does not have access to Catholic victims/survivors who have not ‘come forward’ yet. One of the ways SNAP tries to contact those victims/survivors is through the hierarchy. This is a challenge, given the gulf separating the USCCB and SNAP. SNAP, however, is not bashful in trying to leverage the hierarchy to get to the victim/survivor community. Here again, SNAP uses a combination of powerful invitational language and directives. The former allows SNAP to maintain a respectful posture while pushing for its goals. (Perhaps in order to retain its credibility in the legal arena, SNAP has constrained itself to using a respectful rather than agitating, combative style.) The combination lets SNAP press into the hierarchy as strongly as it can. Note the following quotes.

[SNAP] today sent a letter to ... Bishop Donald Wuerl urging him to provide SNAP free, full-page advertising space in the Diocesan newspaper.... The purpose of the ad is to inform clergy abuse survivors that they are not alone in their pain and that there is help and independent support available. (SNAP, 2004, March 5)

The group will also demand that Mahony notify all parishioners of the number of children who have allegedly been abused since he became Cardinal (in 1985), the names of those perpetrators and their assignments. (SNAP, 2004, April 25)

Leaders of the nation's largest support group for clergy molestation victims are writing the bishops in three states, urging them to follow the lead of the St. Louis Archdiocese and call for victims of a convicted pedophile to report their crimes to law enforcement. (SNAP, 2004, May 24)

In a letter to Archbishop Sheehan, leaders of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) are asking that the archdiocese actively and aggressively seek out victims who may be suffering in silence, by placing ads in the diocesan paper...and church bulletins encouraging anyone who has been abused, witnessed abuse or suspected abuse to contact law enforcement officials. (SNAP, 2004, July 30)

In each of the quotes above, SNAP tries to elicit a particular response from the hierarchy through (strong) invitations or directives. Although SNAP has no control over and little influence on the hierarchy, its PR belies this. Examples of efforts to get the hierarchy to convey SNAP's message to the victim/survivor community abound in SNAP's PR.

SNAP's reliance on written correspondence (a large component of its PR) illustrates another way in which the organization attempts to gain responses from the hierarchy. SNAP underscores the interactive intent of its correspondence when it closes letters with implicit requests for response. For example:

'We look forward to your (prompt) response.'  
 'We look forward to hearing from you soon.'  
 'We await your reply.'



In each closing, SNAP implicitly invites a response from the hierarchy. SNAP letters vary in the intensity of their appeal for response. At times they hope for a response; at other times they demand a response:

...we hope you will consider our moratorium proposal, that would prohibit the treatment centers from accepting any new molesters for the next year. (Dorris & Clohessy letter to Bishop Burke; SNAP, 2005, January 26)

In light of this confirmation, coming from a high ranking Archdiocesan official within your administration, SNAP demands that Fr. Yakaitis be fired immediately. (Clohessy & Blaine letter to Cardinal George; SNAP, 2005, February 8)

In sum, it seems that SNAP uses discursive power in similar ways to VOTF, although for different reasons. Both organizations use a mixture of (strongly) invitational and (politely) directive language in order to engender responses from the hierarchy. Both organizations seem to moderate the strength of their requests at times - VOTF deferring to the USCCB's management, SNAP leveraging the USCCB's access to victims/survivors. In contrast, the USCCB seems largely disinterested in any response from either SNAP or VOTF. Tracing the discursive power in crisis communication indicates that stakeholder organizations speak with a greater or lesser degree of accord with their positional power for a variety of strategic purposes.

### **Conclusion**

The focus in this chapter has been on the interactivity in the press releases/statements of three key stakeholders in the clergy abuse crisis. By adapting Linell's focus on the balance between initiatives and responses to crisis communication, it is possible to extend traditional understandings of the offensive and defensive orientation to crisis communication. What emerges is a hybrid typology of crisis

communication orientations, including offensive-initiatives (i.e., being the first to levy an attack), offensive-responses (i.e., responding to another's discourse with an attack), defensive-initiatives (i.e., using a preemptive defense), and defensive-responses (i.e., responding defensively to an attack).

When applied to the clergy sex abuse crisis, this typology reveals ways in which each organization either offsets or compounds any weakness in its rhetorical position. In particular, the USCCB offsets the weakness inherent in its defensive position by leveraging initiatives. VOTF less successfully attempts to offset the weakness inherent in its responsive orientation by engaging offensive discourse. In addition to sharing this strategy, SNAP employs what might be deemed the typical rhetorical strategy of attack: offensive-initiative discourse. This approach allows SNAP to advance its agenda for crisis-related issues.

By tracking topicality and non-topicality, it is possible to identify what stakeholders treat as the main content of a crisis. Further, by assessing which organization(s)' topic pitches are sustained and which dropped, it is possible to make educated inferences about the flow of power among stakeholder organizations. It is likely that those organizations with more actual power will have fewer dropped topical threads than will those with less actual power. In the current case, each organization made topic pitches that went unaddressed by the other organizations. Further, the USCCB clearly had a number of topic pitches that were faithfully followed by the other organizations. Although the current study introduced and sought to trace the concept of (non)topicality in the context of crisis discourse, a thorough understanding of the

implications of topicality may require a quantitative assessment of dropped versus accepted topic pitches. That is, in order to explore the implications of (non)topicality, it would be necessary to track how many topic pitches were made versus how many engaged for each organization. Unfortunately, this is beyond the scope of the current study.

By tracking how stakeholder organizations enable or constrain responses from one another, it is possible to gain a more complex understanding of how actual power interfaces with discursive power. What emerges is a picture of lower power organizations using strong invitations and polite directives in order to call out responses from the higher power organization, and a higher power organization using declaratives to downplay opportunities for responses. In particular, the USCCB's discourse shows an accord between its actual and its discursive power. It relies on directive language which naturalizes its power. VOTF and SNAP, on the other hand, try to offset their low-power status by using moderately powerful (i.e., strongly invitational and politely directive) language. Both organizations mark (and unintentionally substantiate) their relatively low-power status by tempering the requests they make of the USCCB.

What emerges from this assessment is an awareness of how each organization's discourse is constrained by or rooted in its positional power. This, in turn, draws attention to the driving tension between hierarchy and democracy in this crisis. The hierarchy's conceptualization of the Roman Catholic Church as a closed system constrains VOTF's goal of democratizing the institution and SNAP's goal of affecting it through democratic mechanisms (i.e., the public sphere and legal arenas). The next

chapter touches on how conflicting understandings of ‘the Church’ constrain the construction of this crisis. Key here is the ongoing debate over how the U.S. Church manages (global) expectations for hierarchical control with (local) expectations for democracy. At a fundamental level, this crisis is affected by the dialectical tension of attempting to be a closed hierarchy embedded in a democratic society.

Thus, by adapting Linell’s focus on initiative/response patterns, (non)topicality, and (non)soliciting initiatives, this chapter highlights three key areas in which interactivity illuminates the complexity of crisis communication. The next chapter steps back from the particular findings of the data analysis in order to articulate the analytical framework for analyzing the dialogicality of crisis communication that has emerged in this study. It also discusses the limitations of this study, augmenting each with an area for future research.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **CONCLUSION**

In order to test the analytic capacity of dialogue for public relations, the preceding chapters construct and test a particular dialogical model for understanding crisis communication. They present a descriptive mechanism for sifting PR discourse through a select set of dialogical principles. By drawing multiple stakeholder organizations into a single analytical frame, this model is able to foreground both the holism and tension (Stewart, Zediker, & Black, 2004, pp. 23-29) inherent in the situation.

Stepping away from the detail of the previous two chapters, this chapter seeks to name and clarify the process and findings that have emerged from this grounded study. In particular, it is essential to further articulate three key elements that have emerged: the role of the researcher (facilitator), the central process of the research (discursive reconciliation), and the driving goal of the research (an assessment of collective proprioception). Each is addressed in turn, with special attention being given to the salience of assessing collective proprioception in a church-based crisis. The study concludes with a brief review of limitations and areas for future research.

#### **Researcher as Facilitator**

Although the notion of a facilitator is more prominent in prescriptive views of dialogue than descriptive, it is not irrelevant to a descriptive application of dialogism such as this one. In fact, important parallels may be drawn between the role of the researcher in a dialogical assessment of crisis communication and that of a facilitator in a face-to-face dialogue. This section uses Gerard and Ellinor's (1995) conceptualization

of the role of a dialogue facilitator to clarify the role of the researcher in this dialogical analysis of PR.

According to Gerard and Ellinor, a facilitator acts as a still center, bringing out the tensions and difficulties across the polyphony of the dialogue. This person does not control the outcome of the dialogue, but stimulates it. A facilitator's goal is to hold the key question(s) of the dialogue open, delaying closure so that the dialogue can unfurl. His or her role is to stand as 'witness' to the collective wisdom of the group. According to Gerard and Ellinor, a dialogue facilitator must be comfortable with chaos, have a strong capacity for self-awareness, and be tuned in to both what is being said and what needs to be drawn out. However, a facilitator must not 'rescue' the group at points of tension. Instead s/he must speak from a place of receptive attentiveness which leads the group to an increased collective self-awareness (Gerard & Ellinor, 1995).

Despite the rather idealized language that Gerard and Ellinor (drawing on the work of Bohm) use to describe dialogic facilitation, the preceding is surprisingly representative of the capacities and functions essential to enacting this study. This assessment required the researcher to take an inclusive approach to the crisis discourse produced by multiple stakeholder organizations. This macro-focus required the researcher to bring out tensions across alternately collaborative/competitive discourses, to explore the context of the larger speech situation, and to defer closure throughout the analysis. As will be addressed later in the chapter, this allowed the researcher to trace the collective proprioception (or absence thereof) among stakeholder organizations. Each of these functions paralleled Gerard and Ellinor's conceptualization of facilitation.

One way in which this study did not echo Gerard and Ellinor's conceptualization is the presumption that a facilitator is necessary at the front end of a face-to-face dialogue, but decreasingly necessary as the dialogue unfolds. According to Gerard and Ellinor, as time goes on, the group itself takes on the role of facilitator, becoming a self-guiding system. In the current analysis, however, this sequence was reversed. In order to understand the contested discursive framework of the crisis, it was important to wait until a sufficiently complex collection of discourse had been cached and could be drawn into a single analytical frame. Thus, although the researcher functioned much as a facilitator, the salience of this role to the crisis situation emerged later than it would have in a face-to-face dialogue.

At this point, it is essential to acknowledge the power inherent in positioning the researcher as a type of facilitator. This is especially important in the present case, in which the abuse of power is a central issue. Three (albeit limited) checks that operated in the current study find parallels in Gerard and Ellinor's model. First, a facilitator should contribute only what is additive to the communicative situation. In this way, the facilitator responds to the emergent discourse rather than directing or 'seeding' it. Such a responsive orientation is essential to many applications of dialogical principles (see Stewart, Zediker, & Black, 2004, p. 25 and Wood, 2004, p. xvi). In the dialogical model generated in this study, a responsive orientation positions the analyst in dialogue with, rather than in control of, the data. In essence, the researcher-facilitator is bound by the frames generated and contested by stakeholders.

Second, a facilitator should act as a servant leader and process coach whose goal is to help the group become increasingly self-aware rather than to 'resolve' its key questions or to 'rescue' it. In a dialogical analysis of crisis communication, this means focusing on the communicative process rather than the crisis outcome. It also means viewing some stakeholders' attempts to close the crisis in concert with other stakeholders' attempts to keep it open. Further, since this is an inaugural attempt at mapping crisis discourse from a dialogic perspective, it is essential to describe rather than prescribe the process. Thus, in contrast to Gerard and Ellinor's (1994, 1995) prescriptive orientation to dialogue, the current study seeks to generate a polyphonic awareness of the crisis rather than to prescribe strategies for resolving the crisis. Here, the study functions according to Barge and Craig's (in press) notion of mapping grounded practical theory in which the theorist describes both the communication strategies used by practitioners and their outcomes.

Third, as noted in the discussion of the diminishing role of the facilitator across time, the facilitator's power is checked as it is increasingly assumed by the group. The implication is that shared power is less likely to be abused than that singly held. Although this is difficult to apply to a dialogical assessment of crisis communication, it does delimit the researcher's role in understanding the crisis situation. Although the researcher-facilitator's function may emerge later in the crisis than in a face-to-face dialogue, it still must decrease in time. The goal of a dialogical analyst must be that of diminishing involvement and relinquishing power to stakeholders. Although this may seem a moot point due to the researcher's position as external to (and distant from) the



crisis, it is important to reiterate, given the propensity of dialogic scholars to both live and work from dialogical beliefs (Stewart, Zediker, & Black, 2004, pp. 29-31). That is, dialogical researchers must be aware of and bound their own constitutive role in a crisis.

Despite (or perhaps because of) their seeming naiveté, these checks on the power of a facilitator do clarify the work of a researcher-facilitator. In working from within these specifications, a dialogical analyst will play a temporary, responsive role in the understanding the on-going construction of a crisis situation. Analyzing crisis communication this way served as an important check on the power of the researcher as facilitator in this study, and would do so in other analyses.

Having reflected on the role and power of a dialogical analyst, it is important to address the central process in a dialogical analysis: ‘discursive reconciliation.’

### **Analysis as Discursive Reconciliation**

Although *reconciliation* may refer to the process of making diverse elements harmonious or congruous (clearly not the intent of a dialogical assessment), it may also refer to the process of checking one record against another. In the latter conceptualization, multiple reports are sifted against one another for accounting purposes. Additionally, if one traces the etymology of the word *reconcile*, it leads to the word *conciliate*, which, at its root, comes from the Latin word *concilium*, meaning *assembly* or *council* or the Latin *conciliatus*, which means *to bring together*. This etymological lead is important, because it grounds reconciliation in the context of dynamic polyvocal interactions. From this, one can conceptualize reconciliation as a

process in which multiple accounts, emerging from some social body, are sifted against one another. Understood this way, reconciliation is clearly a dialogical process.

From this notion of reconciliation, the current study proposes the process of *discursive reconciliation* as the central analytical process of a dialogical assessment of crisis communication. To a large degree, this is the process that unfolds in the two data analysis chapters. By sifting multiple discourses against one another, the researcher is able to identify points of collaboration and contest across the dataset. This process uses each organization's discourse as the background against which each other organization's discourse is heard. In this way, the discourses of multiple organizations are mutually revealing. This process is anchored in what Stewart, Zediker, and Black (2004) position as the two essential characteristics of dialogue: holism and tensionality (pp. 23-29).

On one hand, discursive reconciliation draws the discourse of multiple stakeholders into a 'coherent' (i.e., single, but not necessarily unified) frame. It is only by assessing multiple streams of discourse in concert that one can begin to understand PR as a contested process. This aligns with basic assumptions in dialogic philosophy that balance "tendencies toward analysis, separation, and categorization with attempts to be aware of and understand a totality" (Stewart, 1994, p. 26). To offset the risks of a totalizing, static, homogenizing holism, the process of discursive reconciliation proposed in this study foregrounds the ways in which multiple texts contribute to the fluid, dynamic, co-construction of a single communicative situation (Stewart, Zediker, & Black, 2004, p. 27). The current study serves to map the clergy sex abuse crisis as a complex, yet 'coherent' communicative situation.

On the other hand, discursive reconciliation draws on the tension inherent in the communicative construction of a crisis. Stewart, Zediker, and Black (2004) see this as another commonality among the work of Buber, Bakhtin, Bohm, Freire, and Gadamer (p. 27). Unfortunately, this notion is less developed in Stewart's work than is holism. Sandoz links this concept with Plato's *metaxy* or "in-between reality" (in Stewart, 1994, p. 27), and Stewart links it with Bohm's "suspension" (1994, p. 29). It may also be linked to Boden's "facticity in flight" (1994). In order to tap into the tensionality central to dialogue, discursive reconciliation listens for the dissonances, disagreements, disunities, silences, contradictions, clashes, etc. that occur within a communicative situation. These have clearly been drawn out in the preceding analysis.

As with any grounded research process, discursive reconciliation is a relatively messy process in which key assertions, themes, and/or sections are foregrounded in view of the entire dataset. The process of discursive reconciliation is most likely to be fruitful where a set of interdependent organizations are in communication with one another. In such a situation, the discourse of various organizations will ebb and flow in noteworthiness for a variety of reasons. Units of discourse that indicate connectivity, responsiveness, or intersubjectivity on one hand, or differentiation, absence, or disconnection on the other hand, are likely points for analysis. Setting such points against the other texts is a way to map the 'tensile unity' of the communicative situation. At a basic level, the process of discursive reconciliation might be defined as *a process by which texts are drawn into council with one another in order to reveal the tensile holism of a communicative situation.*

Although the two data analysis chapters illustrate the analytical process of discursive reconciliation, the implications of a dialogical analysis of crisis communication for crisis stakeholders have yet to be explored. In order to begin this exploration, the next section introduces the driving goal of a dialogical analysis of crisis discourse: tracing collective proprioception.

### **Goal as Tracking Collective Proprioception**

Again drawing on Bohm, Gerard and Ellinor (1994) note that one of the goals of a dialogue facilitator is to cultivate (for this study, track) collective proprioception. Akin to self-awareness, proprioception is an organism's responsiveness to internal stimuli. For a biological body, it is the capacity to 'hear' (and thus respond to) input from internal organs. This sense allows one to know the relative position of one body part to another, for example, allowing one to touch one's nose while blindfolded or walk through a dark room. For a corporate body, one might conceptualize proprioception as the capacity to receive and respond to stimuli from within the collective. This sense would allow members of a group or organization to know where each is in relation to the others, thus enabling effective (however that may be defined) interactions. This study argues that the process of discursive reconciliation is one way to assess the proprioceptive capacity among a group of crisis stakeholders. Key here is noting whether stakeholders are aware of, responsive to, and collaboratively involved with one another. This goes beyond tracing intersubjectivity or co-orientation to assessing whether or not stakeholders act together out of a mutually responsive awareness.

Given the theoretical framework of this study, it is necessary to allocate the concept of collective proprioception in a slightly different way than one would for an individual. An assessment of organizational proprioception would trace an organization's responsiveness to internal stimuli (e.g., how bishops respond to priests or congregations). This study, however, traces how stakeholder organizations respond to stimuli from one another. In this case, the analytical frame acts as a boundary delineating a collective of stakeholders. Once a reasoned selection of stakeholders has been made, a dialogical assessment (such as that in the preceding two chapters) makes it possible to trace collective proprioception across a crisis. Note though, that whereas Gerard and Ellinor position the facilitator as cultivating collective proprioception, this study positions the researcher-facilitator as simply evaluating the presence/absence of collective proprioception.

Although this may seem idealized, this study argues that collective proprioception is a practical goal in a crisis situation. For example, even powerful organizations like the USCCB may face negative ramifications from failing to acknowledge and/or engage the contested construction of a crisis. The USCCB's failure to engage collective proprioception with key stakeholder organizations arguably led to substantive damage to its image, an extended state of crisis, and reduced influence over the construction of the crisis. Such a disconnected, unconscious approach to crisis management is, at a minimum, not strategic. For less powerful organizations like VOTF and SNAP, tapping into collective proprioception is a key way to understand the dynamics of the crisis as it emerges, to leverage collaborative power, and to engage the

source organization to the greatest effect. Admittedly this raises two practical concerns for PR practitioners. First, they must determine with which organizations to cultivate collective proprioception during a crisis. Second, they must be aware of the potential for the co-optation of collective proprioception for a single organization's benefit.

Despite these concerns, inasmuch as crises are sites of contest, stakeholders, for reasons altruistic or strategic, must stay connected to the interactivity driving crisis management. A dialogical sensibility stands as an essential mechanism for fashioning such an awareness. It is only from a dialogical framework that one can effectively hear and respond to the alternately conflictual and collaborative interplay of multi-party crisis discourse. This is especially important in a case, such as the clergy sex abuse crisis, in which stakeholder organizations make direct and indirect references to one another, manage one another's capacity to speak on key crisis issues, alternate between independent and collaborative speech, and are circumscribed by a body metaphor (as will be addressed later in the chapter). The next section uses the findings from the data analysis to trace collective proprioception in the clergy sex abuse crisis. This is an important final step in teasing out practical implications of a dialogical analysis of the clergy sex abuse crisis.

### **Tracking Collective Proprioception in Current Case**

In order to assess collective proprioception in the clergy sex abuse crisis, one must trace how the stakeholder organizations use discourse to constrain or empower one another. Through their crisis discourse, the organizations may be seen to work together collaboratively (mutually empowering or mutually constraining) or conflictually (one

empowering, the other constraining). This section explores the level of collective proprioception operating among the three stakeholder organizations in this study.

To begin, it is helpful to articulate the distinct goal each organization has for the crisis. Here, each organization's goal is posed in the form of a question to represent its chief pursuit in the situation. For the USCCB, the driving question seems to be: *How can we get this situation under (our) control and move past it?* For VOTF, the key question seems to be: *How can we get the hierarchy's ear?* For SNAP, the motivating question seems to be: *How can we put an end to (systemic) clergy sexual abuse?* These questions, loosely derived from each organization's crisis discourse, reveal some important things about how they orient to one another, and thus manage the possibility of collective proprioception through crisis communication.

The USCCB's question aligns with its monological orientation to crisis discourse. For the USCCB, speaking is more important than listening or responding, and the image of dialogicality is deemed more strategic than the enactment of dialogic communication. Goals of closure and control preclude any substantive discursive interaction with other organizations. Interestingly, this leaves the USCCB disconnected from the crisis, which effectively derails any opportunity for collective proprioception among stakeholders. In this way, the bishops protect their power by precluding collective proprioception. The bishops stand as a 'poster-child' for traditional (monological) apologia. As such, they typify those Wood (2004) describes as being disinclined toward dialogue "whose social locations do not motivate them to risk their material well-being or their comfortable conceptions of self and social life" (p. xx). As

Wood (2004) notes (drawing on McPhail's (1994) work on race and racism), this leaves "those who seek dialogue vulnerable to being silenced, frustrated, or exploited by those who do not" (p. xx). This is clearly the case for VOTF.

VOTF's question reveals its preoccupation with its paradoxical position within the Church. By seeking to affirm and be included in the system it seeks to change, VOTF finds itself in a double bind. Although it seeks to influence the institutional Church, its fundamental, voluntary submission to the hierarchy bounds any impact it can have on the system. This tension emerges from the parent-child relationship between the hierarchy and the laity, marked by VOTF leaders as the 'infantalization' of the laity. Thus, despite its goal of changing the Church, VOTF does much to affirm the power structure of the institution. Without a more radical orientation to the institution, VOTF may find itself unable to answer its driving question. Indeed, the laity (as represented by VOTF) may have to consider the dilemma marked by Wood (2004), who notes: "Those who historically have been denied voices may reasonably believe that in some circumstances nondialogic alternatives are more empowering and have greater potential than dialogue to compel members of the dominant group to recognize and respond to them" (p. xxii).

SNAP's question clearly marks its agenda. It seeks to use whatever resources it can to stop clergy sexual abuse. If this means working in the court system, the policy arena, the institutional Church, or with the laity, then so be it. This organization exhibits a broad repertoire of communication and relational skills, and uses them interchangeably across time to advance its mission. Although this unreciprocated bilingualism is the



mark of a marginalized group (Wood, 2004, p. xxi), it has allowed SNAP to gain an increasingly strategic position in the crisis. By working in multiple arenas simultaneously, SNAP has been able to promote its agenda consistently, regardless of roadblocks. Where it is shut out of one discursive arena (e.g., the Church), it enters another (e.g., the legal arena). Further, as the Church hierarchy grows increasingly quiet on the issues of clergy sexual abuse, SNAP's voice (seems to) become louder. Although it has taken years to occur, and to some degree has been out of SNAP's control, SNAP stands poised at a strategic position of potential influence in the crisis.

When reviewed independently, these questions reveal how each organization orients to the others; when reviewed in concert, they reveal how the potential for collective proprioception is managed vertically (i.e., between the USCCB and VOTF/SNAP) and horizontally (i.e., between VOTF and SNAP). Vertically, there is a general disconnect. Early in the crisis, the hierarchy involves SNAP symbolically (inviting members to address the bishops at the 2002 General Assembly in Dallas) and VOTF conflictually (banning them from Church premises). However, these responses quickly turn to silence, so that for the larger part of the crisis, the USCCB is non-interactive with other stakeholder organizations. Despite this virtual non-responsiveness, both VOTF and SNAP consistently anticipate and try to cultivate mutual awareness and engender responses from the hierarchy. Unfortunately, the USCCB's monological orientation to crisis communication short-circuits VOTF and SNAP's desire for dialogicality, thus debilitating the potential of vertical collective proprioception.

For VOTF, the pursuit of responsiveness is fueled by a naïve trust in the power of dialogue with the leadership to resolve the crisis. The uncritical nature of this pursuit, in the context of an overt rejection of VOTF by many bishops, forces a prioritization between VOTF's paradoxical goals of changing and affirming the Church. In order to be acknowledged by the hierarchy (a passive response), VOTF submits its goal of democratizing the Church to the hierarchy's goal of returning the Church to status quo.

For SNAP, the pursuit of responsiveness by Church leadership is fueled by an awareness that the hierarchy has access to unidentified abuse victims among the laity, one of SNAP's primary publics. Although this leads SNAP to retain a relatively respectful posture to the USCCB, its pursuit of a response is more tempered and strategic than VOTF's. In fact, SNAP's attempts to elicit a response from the hierarchy rival the USCCB's rhetorical power at times by echoing the hierarchy's powerful, declarative language.

For both VOTF and SNAP, the pursuit of responsiveness by the hierarchy requires deference to a standard Catholic Discourse. This deference is marked by the use of Catholic jargon, bending to the hierarchy's authority, and an overall attitude of respect for the leadership. This volitional deference to a Catholic Discourse may be one of the clearest indicators of the dependence of VOTF and SNAP on the hierarchy (and its position as the 'source' organization in this crisis). Both organizations, despite their goals of changing the Church, defer to the hierarchy. VOTF defers due to its definition as a Catholic organization; SNAP defers due to its dependence on the Catholic leadership as an intermediary target. Regardless of the reason, both organizations

position themselves (to a greater or lesser degree) under the auspices of an organization that is either non-responsive or minimally responsive to them.

The lack of any substantive response from the hierarchy is not surprising in light of the power divide separating the organizations. However, it does reveal the complex interrelationships among the stakeholder organizations. Since SNAP defines itself as external to the Church, it is no surprise that its attempts to leverage the hierarchy fall on deaf ears. The hierarchy's lack of response to VOTF, an organization comprised of self-described mainstream Catholics, is more surprising. However, it turns out to be a strategic choice. By banning (a negative response) or ignoring (a non-response) members of VOTF, the hierarchy emphasizes its power over the laity. Given the speed with which VOTF clarified its goals and emphasized its alignment with the hierarchy, the hierarchy's strategy clearly served the bishops' goals. By stonewalling, downplaying, or ignoring both VOTF and SNAP, the hierarchy effectively shuts down every invitation for vertical collective proprioception VOTF and SNAP gave them. (Note that this communicative strategy was as ineffective in controlling the hierarchy's public image and maintaining its jurisdiction over the crisis as it was effective in controlling the laity.)

Perhaps the more interesting analysis comes when one addresses the horizontal interactions between stakeholders. (Since there is no peer organization for the USCCB, this section defaults to an assessment of VOTF and SNAP's discourse.) Clearly VOTF and SNAP cultivate horizontal collective proprioception. From the data, it is possible to come up with 12 single-spaced pages of quotes in which VOTF and SNAP indicate a

responsive awareness of one another. These quotes reveal a series of ways in which the two organizations exemplify a mutual awareness that allows them to work in tandem.

Two of these capacities seem unique to VOTF: giving the floor to SNAP and listening to survivors. The former may be a result of VOTF's position as internal to the Church; that is, since it has constructed a Catholic identity, VOTF deems itself capable of offering discursive space to survivors. The latter is clearly the result of SNAP's constitution as a victim support organization; listening to members of SNAP is one way to meet VOTF's goal of supporting victims/survivors. It may also indicate VOTF's view of itself as a representative of the Church, and thus as responsible for and/or capable of restorative listening. Beyond these positionally-bound strategies, however, VOTF and SNAP seem to share a set of collaborative discursive strategies, which may be grouped into three main categories, as follows.

First, they speak and act together. They attend the same meetings, use quotes from one another as sound bites, speak at one another's events, and disseminate nearly identical statements. For example, early in the crisis, VOTF notes that it joined SNAP in a meeting with NRB chair Governor Keating (VOTF, 2002, October 4). In describing that meeting, VOTF quotes a SNAP representative as saying that, "The governor heard and seemed to agree that victims need to be listened to by the bishops, in the same way we have been listened to by Voice of the Faithful" (VOTF, 2002, October 4). Not only are they at the same meeting, but SNAP serves as a sound bite for VOTF. In this instance (one among many examples), VOTF and SNAP underscore one another's voice.

A similar effect occurs when representatives from one organization speak at an event sponsored by the other organization. This happens regularly, and is marked in each organization's PR. In these instances, the organizations showcase one another's voices and messages. They also emphasize the overlap between the organizations, essentially narrating their interdependence. Note the following excerpt of a speech given by then-president of VOTF, James Post at a SNAP conference:

I wanted to be here with you in Chicago this weekend for two reasons. First, I want to say to each of you ... that we stand together in the fight for social justice for survivors of clergy sexual abuse. Voice of the Faithful and SNAP continue to cooperate in a fight to rid the Catholic Church of one of the great evils of our lifetime –clergy sexual abuse. (VOTF, 2005, June 11)

Here, the organizations are shining the spotlight on one another in order to highlight their collaboration and unity.

At other times, VOTF and SNAP essentially echo one another's voices. Note the two nearly identical paragraphs that appear in VOTF and SNAP press releases on May 31, 2004, as the organizations attempt to influence the USCCB's national meeting. (The miniscule differences are italicized.)

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) and Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) are calling on the U.S. Catholic Bishops to open their national meeting in June to public scrutiny and participation. The groups are also asking the Bishops to recommit to the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People that they passed in Dallas in 2002. (VOTF, 2004, May 31)

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A similar overlap happens in December 2004 when the groups share a call for independent audits. Clearly, posting the same content on the same day indicates that the two organizations are working in concert. Similar interaction happens when they co-sign letter a letter to Bishop Skylstad about the strategy of bankruptcy (SNAP, 2004, December 1).

Second, they mark one another's actions and advance one another's goals. Although the latter is not the most common use of coordinated speaking and acting between VOTF and SNAP, several excellent examples emerge in the dataset. In one, VOTF encourages its members to participate (as activists) in a 2003 Lenten prayer service in Boston. One of the things they ask members to do is to prepare a donation for SNAP or another survivor support group (VOTF, n.d., "Massachusetts VOTF members"). By asking VOTF members to bring a check made out to a survivor support group, VOTF is simultaneously rerouting money away from the archdiocese and supporting the work of SNAP (and other survivor support organizations). In another example, SNAP restates, affirms, and extends a local VOTF chapter's agenda regarding an abusive situation. Similarly, immediately after SNAP successfully stops a Ford truck ad that played on the issue of clergy sexual abuse, VOTF affirms SNAP's action and extends it, 'calling on' Ford officials to meet with clergy sex abuse survivors (2005, February 3). By affirming and/or extending one another's organizational goals, both VOTF and SNAP evidence a responsive awareness of one another.

They also use their press releases to draw attention to one another's actions. For example, SNAP describes the increasing engagement of the laity by saying: "We are

also hopeful because regular Catholics are doing more. ...through organizations like Voice of the Faithful, they're supporting survivors in more ways than we ever dared hope five or ten years ago (SNAP, 2003, June 18). In this statement, SNAP traces VOTF's actions and their effects. Similarly, VOTF notes when members of SNAP meet with the NRB and the lack of closure that meeting engenders (VOTF, 2004, December 13). Selectively marking one another's actions may be seen as an indirect form of publicizing, affirming, and advancing one another's goals.

Third, they defend and honor one another. Here, the organizations exemplify an empathetic awareness of one another that is marked actively and symbolically. For example, when VOTF found out that the Diocese of Worcester had subpoenaed SNAP's records of all those alleging abuse in the diocese, it expressed "deep disappointment" and decried the subpoena as a disturbing tactic that would "only serve to inflict more pain on the survivors of sexual abuse," (Post; VOTF, 2002, September 23). By publicizing the action of the diocese, VOTF makes a passive defense of SNAP. Similarly, SNAP offers a defense of VOTF in light of the bannings. In July 2003, the organization calls on the new archbishop of Boston (Sean O'Malley) to "immediately lift the ban on Voice of the Faithful. Doing this will show that he understands the value of genuine, independent lay voices in healing this fractured, dispirited church" (SNAP, 2003, July 1). Each organization shows an awareness of and willingness to publicly defend the other's vulnerabilities.

They are also aware of and willing to publicly celebrate one another. For example, VOTF introduces two key SNAP leaders as "honored guests" at a press

briefing before the June 2003 USCCB general assembly (VOTF, 2003, June 19). Then, in September 2004, SNAP gives its “Survivors Lifeline Award” to Jim Alvord, Regional Director of VOTF in the Bridgeport Diocese. They applaud him “for his work on behalf of survivors” and describe him as “a strong and vigilant voice in support of survivors” (2004, September 21). Perhaps the best example of VOTF’s honoring SNAP comes from a speech given by James Post at SNAP’s conference in June 2005. There, Post is quoted as saying:

My second reason for being here today is to publicly thank SNAP and its leaders ... for your support of Voice of the Faithful. Your participation in the work of VOTF has made a great difference to us. You have told the story of your experience, an experience that is deeply personal and painful. We know it is not easy to speak about these matters, even to a sympathetic audience, and that makes us all the more appreciative of the trust you have placed in us. Thank you.

You have also helped us mobilize and motivate thousands of people to leave their “comfort zones” and take actions they would not otherwise have done. ... You have stirred the conscience of Catholics across this nation, and set in motion processes of change that will help us one day achieve justice for survivors and safety for all children and adults in our Church. (VOTF, 2005, June 11)

Not only does this illustrate how the organizations speak and act together (as noted in the previous paragraphs), but it also illustrates how they honor one another. By expressing gratitude for SNAP, Post clearly honors the organization’s role in the crisis.

Although this is not an exhaustive review of the ways in which collective proprioception is at work between VOTF and SNAP, it does mark a thread of mutual awareness that allows the organizations to function in concert. In order to trace horizontal collective proprioception, then, it is important to note whether stakeholder organizations are markedly conscious of one another, and if so, whether they are oriented collaboratively or conflictually, and if they are (discursively) interactive with



one another. In the current case, it is clear that VOTF and SNAP are conscious of and collaboratively oriented toward one another. Further, they are both discursively and actively involved with one another in the crisis. This marks a strong horizontal collective proprioception in the crisis.

From this perspective, the crisis is a communicative situation in which VOTF and SNAP evince a willingness and capacity for collective proprioception, both vertically and horizontally. Where they meet the USCCB, there is a blockage of any potential collective proprioception due to the USCCB's discursive strategies. Where they meet one another, there is a thriving (horizontal) responsive other-awareness. Assessing the differential levels of collective proprioception among stakeholders becomes especially relevant for a church-based crisis, as the next section shows.

### **Collective Proprioception in the Church**

To more fully understand the implications of how the USCCB, VOTF, and SNAP manage the potential for collective proprioception in this crisis, it is necessary to set the analysis back into the context of 'the church.' (Not only is this crisis based in the Catholic Church, but each of the organizations studied is directly linked with the Church.) An assessment of collective proprioception is especially apropos to a crisis in the church for two reasons. One on hand, collective proprioception is a concept based on the human body. On the other hand, the church has historically been described as a body. Indeed, one of the central Biblical metaphors for the church is that of a body, as the following quotes illustrate.

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and

each member belongs to all the others. (Romans 12:4-5 New International Version)

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. ... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (from I Corinthians 12)

...I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. (Colossians 1:24)

The image that emerges through these New Testament references and others is that of the church as the metaphorical body of Christ. As such, it is a collection of diverse, yet interdependent parts. However, the metaphor of a body is constructed in different ways by each of the organizations studied here. This different understanding of the body may, in turn, affect how each organization orients to the potential for collective proprioception.

The notion of church-as-body is clearly evident in VOTF's discourse. Given the intermediary function VOTF serves between the defending source organization (i.e., the USCCB) and the external dissent organization (i.e., SNAP), it is not surprising that VOTF uses the body metaphor in a similar way to the biblical writer, Paul. For VOTF, the church is a broadly inclusive spiritual body comprised of a diversity of parts. Note the following quotes from VOTF press releases.

"We are all members of the body of Christ. Leadership, we are told in the scriptures, is ordered to service in the community. If these words are to be real, then risky and radical action is often required of the members. The victims and survivors of clergy sexual abuse have risen up and spoken to the entire Catholic community.... Together we have demanded accountability, justice and compassion of our bishops. We have not found it." (Doyle letter to NH-VOTF; VOTF, 2003, May 16)

...laypersons...are an essential part of the Body of Christ. (VOTF, 2003, October 27)

“Voice of the Faithful...seeks to...call forth the talents of all members of the Body of Christ.” (Ward; VOTF, 2005, June 17)

In both their own words and in strategic quotes by people like Rev. Doyle, VOTF leaders hold up the ideal of the church as an inclusive, interactive organism comprised of a diversity of valued members. This notion of church as body clearly guides VOTF’s attempt to cultivate collective proprioception with other stakeholders in the crisis. The body metaphor allocated by VOTF also draws attention to ways in which the hierarchy enacts a differing notion of the body.

In its (infrequent) use of this metaphor, the USCCB is more likely to refer to the Bishops’ council rather than the larger Church. In this way, the hierarchy strategically delimits any notion of organic interdependence to the USCCB. Where it broadens this metaphor beyond itself, the USCCB retains its focus on managerial bodies that will, ultimately report to itself. Note the following quotes.

The Administrative Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has put the problem of sexual abuse of minors by clergy on the agenda of the June General Meeting of the full body of Bishops. (USCCB, 2002, March 14)

The draft Charter will be voted on at the meeting of the full body of Catholic bishops.... “...we felt this possibility had to go the full body.” (Archbishop Flynn; USCCB, 2002, June 4)

"To assist diocesan/eparchial bishops," they will have a review board which will function as a "confidential consultative body" to the bishop/eparch in discharging his responsibilities (revised norms, #4, opening). (USCCB, 2002, November 4)

“We are grateful to the body of bishops and to the Holy See for the strong support and ultimately the recognition that have enabled us now to implement these measures.” (Archbishop Flynn; USCCB, 2003, February 27)

Note how the formal, managerial allocation of the body metaphor contrasts to VOTF's use of an inclusive, spiritual body. Implicit in the bishops' discourse is an acknowledgement that power resides in a decision-making, policy-making body. Despite calling for some collaborative action by members of the Church (see Chapter VI), the bishops ultimately tie the power of collective action back to managerial entities.

Interestingly, SNAP's application of body metaphors is similar to the USCCB's. Body metaphors that appear in SNAP's press releases and statements tend to refer to particular decision-making entities appointed by the hierarchy. For example:

"...it's hard to see this body [the NRB] as being unbiased." (Serrano; SNAP, 2002, July 22)

Curtiss, on the floor of the annual bishops conference meeting ... recommended that the body "censure bishops who had transferred priests accused of sexual abuse of minors from parish to parish." (SNAP, 2002, November 14)

We applaud those conscientious Catholics who serve on this body [diocesan lay review panel overseeing abuse cases]. (SNAP, 2003, July 28)

... only a handful of bishops ever publicly criticized him [Cardinal Law] and the conference as a body has never seen fit to publicly call him to task for the severe harm he has caused to so many. (SNAP, 2004, November 16)

In these quotes, SNAP's use of the body metaphor aligns with the USCCB's. Here, a body is a group vested with decision-making power by the hierarchy. SNAP's contribution to this metaphor for collective action is a criticism of its managerial bias. Whereas the USCCB naturalizes the power inherent in its managerial bodies, SNAP problematizes and seeks to influence it.

In contrast to its emphasis on managerially controlled bodies, SNAP does make an allusion to the church-as-body in a letter co-signed by SNAP and VOTF representatives.

...A few weeks ago, Pope John Paul ... talked of the need for a "shared responsibility" between the lay faithful and the hierarchy. We hope you will listen to and embrace his call for greater collaboration within the body of the church. (Hardy, Pember, & Pember letter to Bishop Skylstad; SNAP, 2004, December 1)

Here, SNAP echoes VOTF's view of the body. That this allusion is in a letter co-written by SNAP and VOTF raises questions about which organization is the source of the reference. Despite this uncertainty, it shows SNAP to be aware of an alternative application of the body metaphor. In essence, SNAP is conversant in two understandings of 'the body.'

From this vantage point, it is clear that the three stakeholder organizations use the body metaphor differently. VOTF retools its original vision of an inclusive spiritual body to request a hierarchically ordered body that is (to some degree) participative and responsive. Further delimiting the scope of the symbol, the USCCB draws on uncritical, self-referential body metaphors. The bishops view themselves as an exclusive managerial body. As such, they do not align themselves with the other organizations. SNAP takes a rather complex view of the corporate body. On one hand it critiques and seeks to influence managerially controlled bodies (i.e., committees/boards); on the other hand, it leverages the potential of an inclusive, collaborative body (i.e., church). The complexity of this position indicates an alignment with both the USCCB's notion of a body and with VOTF's notion of a body.

Here, it is interesting to return to New Testament writings on the church-as-body. In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul indicates two interesting dis-membering phenomena possible in the church-body. On one hand, members may distance themselves from the church out of shame (i.e., "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body."). On the other hand, some members may disown others out of pride (i.e., "I don't need you!"). Paul argues against this dis-membering action by declaring the body as a multiplicity combined by God. The warning is that dis-membering the church (by divorcing oneself from it or by disowning others from it) is counter to the church's basic organizing principle. In advocating for a heterogeneous organization, Paul positions the church as a social organism comprised of diversity within a larger unity. This stands as a fascinating backdrop to the findings of this study.

Inasmuch as VOTF is (contestedly) nested within the 'body' of the Catholic Church and SNAP is comprised of current and former Catholics who submit to the Discourse of Catholicism to some degree, there is an intimate connection among the three organizations. Strikingly in line with Paul's word picture in I Corinthians 12, the USCCB paints itself as head of 'the body,' VOTF protests against being disowned by the body, and SNAP, having separated itself from the body, speaks from the complex position (c.f., the subject position of 'insider without' in ethnographic research). What emerges from this case is a picture of the church as a dis-membered body. Interestingly, though, there seems to be a re-membering of that body where VOTF and SNAP are functionally interrelated. That is, even as the bishops refuse to function with the laity and survivors, the latter two form an empathetic, reciprocal connection, as the assessment of

collective proprioception indicates. Only time will tell how this dis-membering and re-membering of stakeholder organizations will affect the Church.

At this point, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the interactive potentials in the current case in light of the body metaphor. First, the USCCB's goals (closure and control) are antithetical to and thus preclude collective proprioception. Church management seems to have bought into and been made vulnerable by its own rhetoric of defensibility. To offset this risk, the hierarchy must open itself to a different type of vulnerability – that of listening, learning, and being responsively aware of its constituents. Second, VOTF is strategically positioned between those inside the Church and those outside of it. From this position, it could access key internal publics (e.g., laity and victims/survivors still in the Church) that SNAP has not been able to access through the hierarchy. Third, SNAP's broad, yet dogged focus on key issues could offset VOTF's tendency to relinquish its mission in deference to the hierarchy. Its role and capacity as agenda setter or issue manager could redeem VOTF's tendency to focus on identity-based, deferential issues. There is clearly potential for more (inter)action as the crisis continues to unfold.

### **Limitations and Future Study**

As with any study, there are numerous limitations to the current dissertation. Several are reviewed here. First, the data set used for this study is comprised only of press releases and statements posted on the organizations' web pages. Although this provided a mode of PR communication that could be compared across the organizations, it in no way exhausts the public relations discourse produced by each organization

during the timeframe. There has been an overwhelming amount of public relations discourse (textual and non-textual, traditional and non-traditional) produced in the clergy abuse crisis. A fuller study might address ways in which the stakeholder organizations engage crisis communication across a variety of communication channels and forms.

Second, since this was a preliminary attempt at mapping a particular dialogical model for analyzing crisis communication, it runs in two directions at once. That is, this dissertation sought to both construct and apply a particular analytical framework. Had the goal been to apply a preexisting analytical framework to the dataset, the analysis could have plumbed the depths of the data more fully. Given the recursive goals of constructing an analytical methodology and generating a case analysis, case-specific findings are constrained. The primary emphasis of this grounded approach was on crafting a tool for later analyses. Although it was applied to the clergy abuse data, it was done more to test the utility of the framework than to exhaustively engage the case. This was a difficult, but necessary choice, given the constraints of the project and the size of the task. A next step would be to apply the mechanism more fully to reveal the case rather than to prove the tool.

Third, in charting a dialogical framework for crisis communication, an interesting quandary emerges. On one hand, the research on dialogue is vast and complex. On the other hand, the research on crisis communication is relatively under-developed. Trying to work with these literatures simultaneously is like trying to lift weights with one well-toned arm and one atrophied arm; one vacillates between protecting the weak arm and challenging the strong arm. It is difficult to make the



simplicity of the crisis literature keep pace with the complexity of the dialogue literature. This dissertation has attempted to balance the two literatures by offering a clarified notion of dialogue and a more complex notion of crisis communication.

Fourth, discourse analytic approaches to dialogue generally focus on face-to-face interactions. This study takes a non-typical approach by adapting Linell's work to a mediated communication situation. One of the challenges in this approach was applying a micro-level analysis to an extensive dataset. Although understanding the ways in which language is used is essential to understanding the construction of a large-scale communication situation, it is difficult to do discourse analysis on an extensive data set. Finding ways to analyze linguistic particulars on large quantities of crisis discourse would be helpful. Further, a fuller exploration of the risks and benefits of adapting discourse analytic (i.e., micro-level) approaches to non-face-to-face communication is necessary.

Fifth, in addressing the press releases/statements as texts rather than as computer mediated communication (CMC), the current study leaves many fascinating questions unaddressed. Although this study acknowledges the virtual nature of this crisis discourse, it deserves to be studied in its own right. The research on CMC could certainly be brought to bear on the current analysis, indicating ways in which the asynchronicity of CMC may or may not affect crisis management. A general reading of the PR literature on the use of 'new' technologies shows practitioners using new technologies in old ways. However, in the current case, there are some interesting hybridizations of communication mechanisms. For example, SNAP and VOTF use CMC

to both enact and narrate their own PR. It is important to address ways in which CMC affects the communicative construction of a crisis. It is also important to explore whether CMC is a mechanism for bridging the power divide, given its capacity to equalize, or whether it merely gives the illusion of equality, which might ultimately serve to short circuit actual inter- and intra-organizational engagement.

Sixth, this study fails to address the role of media in the construction of a crisis. Although this is not a problem for the current study, since the data set is comprised of controlled rather than uncontrolled media, the role of media in any public relations situation cannot be overlooked. The media plays a central role in PR, serving as an intermediary audience between an organization and its publics. What is unclear in the current study is how a dialogical framework might illuminate the media's role in crisis communication. It would also be interesting to apply a dialogical framework to controlled and uncontrolled media in a crisis. This might unearth ways in which organizations manage the context and interactivity in their discourse, depending on how much control they have over that discourse.

Seventh, in contrast to the bulk of crisis research, this study focuses on three non-profit organizations. It takes as its 'source organization' a powerful religious bureaucracy that spans space and time. VOTF is an agenda-driven grassroots organization with a debated position in the Church. Also agenda-driven, SNAP is a grassroots organization that positions itself as external to the Church, yet defines itself in relation to the Roman Catholic Church. Although the research on crisis management and communication applies to all sectors, one can't help but wonder how the sectoral

orientation of an organization and the sector(s) within which a crisis is managed affect the crisis. More research is needed to understand these affects. Further, although the current study indicates the salience of a dialogical framework for understanding any organizational crisis, it does not address how that salience might change in the profit and governmental sectors.

Eighth, the current study does not address ways in which the type of crisis may affect the illuminatory power of a dialogical approach. More study is necessary to determine whether a dialogical approach is more or less salient depending on the type of crisis. Although it is a rich way to understand the dynamics of the current case, a moral scandal, this does not address how revealing it would be for other types of crises (e.g., product-safety incidents and accidents).

### **Conclusion**

Despite these limitations and the need for further study, this dissertation offers an important contribution to the literature. By viewing crisis communication through the lens of a particular notion of dialogue (i.e., *a sustained, symbol-based, contextualized, collaborative-agonistic process of interactive social inquiry which creates meaning and a potential for change*), it is possible to trace how stakeholder organizations use public relations discourse to co-construct an organizational crisis. By proposing *discursive reconciliation* as the central process of a dialogical analysis of crisis communication, it is possible to sift the discourses of stakeholder organizations against one another, using each as a standard for evaluating the others. By marking *collective proprioception*, it is possible to illuminate how stakeholder organizations manage the potential for

communicative interactivity. What emerges from this study is an inaugural attempt to articulate a dialogical model for analyzing public relations discourse. The complexity of the process and the richness of the findings indicate the illuminatory potential of such a model. Despite its limitations, the dialogical approach to public relations discourse offered in this study opens the door to much further study.

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